SHORT STORIES

No. 802. Week Ending May 14, 1904. Price One Penny.

Triumphantly she held the valuable parcel on high, but she did not see the figure that was about to snatch it from her grasp! It was Maurice Westmoir—the detective!

(An Exciting Incident from the Story, "A Deal in Diamonds." See inside.)

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SHORT STORIES

No. 802.] [ONE PENNY.

For the Week Ending May 14th, 1904.

Containing the incident depicted on the cover.

A DEAL IN DIAMONDS.

Telling how a Small Parcel of Stolen Gems was Passed to the Wrong Person and what Came of the Mistake.

"OH, I do wish the rain and wind would stop!" cried the girl distressfully, as she strove to make headway, with opened umbrella, against a howling wind that drove the rain fiercely before it, drenching her skirt, and making her feel quite crumpled up. She had some difficulty in keeping her breath, and she realised that the umbrella would quickly go inside out if she continued to hold it up. "I must shut it and get still more wet!" she gasped despairingly.

She stood still for a moment with the intention of closing the umbrella, and then she saw that she was in front of the steps of the Holborn Viaduct. It would have been worse than useless to have attempted to go over the Viaduct without closing it; the wind would have caught her with even more force. She placed her finger on the catch, but she was too late. A gust of wind which seemed to come from all four quarters of the compass at one time gave the umbrella a twist this way and that; she clutched frantically at it, and gave a tug that certainly had the effect of shutting it, but not until two at least of the ribs had suffered, and the covering had been torn in more than one place.

Nora Brecon felt like crying; troubles never come alone, and she had had enough and to spare of troubles lately. However, she had no time to indulge in that relief to the overwrought nerves; she was forced to take immediate refuge under the shelter of the archway at the top of the steps in order to save herself from a thorough drenching.

She managed to get her handkerchief out and wipe her dripping face, but she had scarcely begun that process when the figure of a man appeared.

"Here, take it quick, and be off; I'm shadowed!" cried the man, whom she could barely distinguish in the gathering darkness. He thrust something into the hands of the bewildered girl, and flew down the steps. At the same moment there was a shout from the roadway—a shout followed by a cry that rose above the noise of the rattle of cabs and omnibuses; everything seemed to be in confusion in the road. Nora understood that some poor creature had been run over in attempting to cross the road, and the thought, in her present distressed and agitated condition, upset her greatly. She shuddered, left the friendly shelter and hurried away in the rain as fast as she could go, with that cry from the injured person still haunting her.

"I must give it up for to-day and go home!" she almost sobbed. "Home!" It sounded like a mockery! "I can get a 'bus from here to go part of the way."

For once Fortune favoured her in a small way; she was successful in obtaining an inside seat right at one end.

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Having now some time in which to think collectedly and to breathe freely, she began to reflect on the probable nature of the injuries suffered by that unfortunate pedestrian; and then the recollection of the man in the archway came to her like a flash!

Where was that something which he thrust into her hands, or, to speak more correctly, that which he had pushed against her hands? She tried to remember whether she had actually grasped the object or not, but she could not recall the exact occurrence. Where was it? She had not got it, so much was certain! It must have dropped to the ground; probably she let it fall when the cry fell on her ears. What did it contain, and what did he mean by saying that he was shadowed? Those questions were so many riddles to Nora Brecon, and she gave up the attempts to answer them. It really appeared as if some thief had tried to pass his booty in order to save himself; but why try to pass it to her?

Nora's home was a small bed-sitting-room in the equally small house kept by Mr. and Mrs. Smithers. The lady of the house had been an old servant of the Brecons in the happier days, and had always borne an affectionate remembrance of little Miss Nora; but she had heard very little of the family for nearly ten years, and it gave her quite a shock when, a week prior to the opening date of this story, a girl had come up to her in the street and asked if she were Mrs. Smithers. She replied involuntarily in the affirmative, and then she recognised that this girl was little Miss Nora. She was so like her dear mother that there was no mistaking the resemblance!

The kind-hearted woman learnt a sad story of loss of money by the failure of the firm of which Nora's father was chief partner, and of death. Nora's mother had died five years before, so the girl was alone in the world and practically penniless. Mrs. Smithers further learnt that Nora Brecon had been in London a fortnight, trying to obtain a situation as nursery governess or companion, but without success. She only had one sovereign left when she accidentally met the old servant, whom she had half-believed to recognise from a photo; she had asked the question at hazard, and she had been correct.

So Mrs. Smithers insisted that the girl should go to her own house, where she could lodge free, and so eke out her sovereign.

"You can pay me, if you feel you must, when you get on a bit!" Mrs. Smithers had said. And thus it was settled.

Mrs. Smithers was out when Nora returned, so the girl let herself in with the key which had been lent to her. She

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placed the wrecked umbrella in the scullery to dry; she did not like to throw it into the dust-bin, for it had been a present from her father. It was probably quite useless, but she could keep it; there was some comfort even in retaining it, worthless as it was now.

"I can't afford to buy another!" sighed the girl, "so I must borrow Mrs. Smithers' or go out only when the weather is fine."

She did her best to be cheerful, but it was a relief when she could lay her head on her pillow and court sleep, which mercifully came very quickly.

In the morning she felt better, and ready once more to look for a situation of some kind, although it might be only to address envelopes. Two days passed in a weary hunt for the means of earning a living, and on each of those evenings she passed unintentionally over the Viaduct. On the second day she was passing those steps when a hand was placed on her shoulder.

"Were you standing here in the rain two evenings ago?" asked a voice.

She looked up with a start, and saw a man of about twenty-five gazing fixedly at her with keen, blue eyes.

"Yes, that is correct!" she responded, a feeling of fear creeping over her. "Why?"

"Why? Because that being so, you can tell me what became of that small packet of stolen—property!" was the rejoinder.

"I do not know!" stammered poor Nora in dismay at this verification of her original suspicion. "I don't think I had it! That is, I don't know anything about it!"

The man's face, which had assumed an expression of puzzled amusement, became grave.

"It seems to me that you are trying to play the innocent, and are not a good hand at deceiving people!" he remarked sarcastically.

"I have never attempted to deceive people!" cried Nora, her anger rising at this imputation. She drew herself up to her full height and looked so dignified that Maurice Westmoir thought that she must be more than twenty, the age which he had first ascribed to her; she seemed to have added three or four years to her record by that attitude.

"How dare you say that to me?" she continued. "What have I to do with your stolen property?"

"H'm!" thought Maurice. "I thought that she was a new hand and was making a mess of it, but this looks like genuine innocence! No, I don't think there is any acting here! Then what on earth is at the bottom of it all?" Aloud, he said: "I beg your pardon! I see that there is some mistake, some mystery which I did not suspect! I am a detective, trying to unravel a tangle—not a regular detective, I ought to say, but that does not matter. You may be able to throw some light on it. Can I see you anywhere? At the house of someone you know, who can be present?"

His tone was very deferential now, and although it was twilight, yet Nora fancied she detected a light in his eyes that made her feel strangely fluttered. The sensation was not unpleasant, and she answered, somewhat shyly:

"If you like to come to Mrs. Smithers' this evening, she will be at home, and I will tell you all I know!"

"Thank you!" he said courteously, and he made a note of the address.

"I'm sure I don't know if I have done right!" cried Nora to Mrs. Smithers, at the end of her story. "But I told him, and no doubt he will come. He gave me his card; his name is Maurice Westmoir!"

"I don't like young men!" observed the good lady emphatically. "But it'll be all right; *I* shall be here!"

She looked so dragon-like that most people would have agreed with her in the assertion that it would be "all right."

Maurice Westmoir arrived; he was so polished in his manner that the old servant, who prided herself on her ability to recognise a gentleman when she saw one, melted considerably.

"You wonder how it was that I knew you were the lady who was standing at that spot?" he began, addressing Nora. "It is soon explained. A robbery of diamonds has been committed; the police had a clue to the thief. He was trying to get those diamonds to an accomplice—a woman, it was suspected, from his antecedents—who would take them to Holland to dispose of them. The police had got on his track; a detective had succeeded in getting close to him while he had a packet of stones on him. The man dodged across the road on the Viaduct, and the detective followed. The officer was so intent on keeping the man in view that he forgot to be cautious of the traffic. The officer saw the light from a passing vehicle fall on the face of a young woman whom the man went up to; although it was only a flash, the detective saw enough to describe you very well. Then he went under a cab, and was hurt. Oh, not so very badly, Miss Brecon!" he added hastily, as the girl turned pale. "It turns out that his injuries are not severe!"

"I'm so glad!" said Nora simply. "Yes, that is true, and now I will continue the story!" She told him of her own experiences, and concluded: "I suppose you have watched for me in various places?"

"Several of us have!" he laughed. "I had some kind of a presentiment that you would go that way again, and I was right!"

"I am so sorry that I have lost the parcel!" said Nora regretfully. "What is to be done?"

"You can help me to catch the rogues, at least!" remarked Maurice. "And perhaps we shall get most of the other stones back. From what we know, there should have been someone else at the spot at that time, but doubtless the weather delayed that fair accomplice, and you were mistaken for her in his agitation. Now, both the thief and his accomplice must feel very much annoyed that a blunder was committed, and will be on the look-out for a chance to regain possession of that packet. I have a scheme for making use of that fact in order to trap them, and I want your assistance!"

Nora did not like the idea much, but when she raised a rather timid protest, and turned her tender eyes to his, she noticed something in his face that stopped the words on her lips and caused a slight tinge of colour to mantle her cheeks.

"Oh, I am sure you don't feel at all afraid!" he replied, in answer to her half-uttered protestation. He spoke so warmly that the colour on Nora's cheeks deepened. "It will be quite simple—and I shall be close at hand to guard you from any attempt at mischief on their part, you see!"

He appeared to think that this argument would be quite sufficient to allay her fears, and Nora herself was rather surprised when left alone a short time afterwards, to remember that she also had a similar feeling! Maurice Westmoir spoke with so confident an air, with such brotherly—yes, that was it!—with such *brotherly* care, that how could she help feeling that all would be well if he were only near her?

"This is the scheme," pursued Maurice eagerly. "We have learnt a lot about these rascals, and we know that they sometimes use a certain cipher. So I propose to insert an advertisement in a particular journal to the effect that a young lady who received a packet by mistake will be glad to return the same if the address to which it should be returned is stated in a letter to be sent to Miss Welsh (your name sounds Welsh, you know!) at some address on which we can decide—some shop where you can have letters sent on payment of a small fee. I fancy that the plan will give us a good clue!"

"But I haven't got the packet!" said Nora dismally.

"That doesn't matter, Miss Nora!" interrupted Mrs. Smithers, who had remained silent all this time, although anxiously awaiting an opportunity to say something. "The advertisement won't be in strict accordance with the truth"—that was a phrase which Mrs. Smithers had picked up—"but you must fight rascals with some of their own weapons!"

"Exactly!" concurred Maurice Westmoir quickly. But he kept his eyes averted from Nora; it seemed like sacrilege to teach this girl the wiles of the world.

It occurred to Mrs. Smithers that Mr. Westmoir stayed longer than was absolutely necessary, but she said nothing. He came the next evening, and that advertisement required

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a lot of editing and altering. And the next two evenings he came again, and made inquiries about how Nora had stood near the Viaduct steps and other trivial matters which he appeared to regard as very important. Nora found herself looking forward to his coming, and she explained this by telling herself that it was because she was so lonely and so unsuccessful in obtaining work.

Mr. Westmoir had learnt her history, and he had told her his own; he was the son of the diamond merchant from whom the stones had been stolen. He hinted that he might be able to help her to obtain employment, and he urged her to remain at home for a day or two, as she was tiring herself and might find herself laid up with nervous prostration. Poor Nora thought that he would not have given that advice if he had known her financial position exactly! Yet she felt constrained to act upon the kindly advice, for she realised that she was breaking down.

The advertisement had been in for three days, and on the evening of the third day Maurice came again; in fact he had not missed one evening since his first call! He found that she had remained in the house all day, owing to having caught a chill.

"We must get someone to go to-morrow to see if there are any letters," he said. "You have not been able to go to-day?"

"No," answered Nora. "It was useless for Mrs. Smithers or anyone else to go for them, as the people will only give them up to me! They took good stock of me when I made the arrangement, for that very purpose. Otherwise, anyone could get my letters! I shall feel better to-morrow."

He appeared ill at ease, though he tried to talk cheerfully. The conversation flagged; Mrs. Smithers dropped one or two broad hints about his going, which he did not take, and then she was forced to leave them together because she had something to attend to. After all, Miss Nora was able to take care of herself, surely!

The conversation did not brighten, even after the landlady's departure Maurice was decidedly preoccupied. They sat silent for quite five minutes, and, when Nora ventured to turn her eyes towards him, she found that he was gazing at her with undisguised admiration and longing!

"I thought I should never fall in love again!" he said abruptly. "But I have done so, Nora!"

It was a most unconventional declaration! Nora Brecon could not doubt that it was meant for her! She hastily turned her face from him.

"You turn from me! Perhaps you have a right to do so!" he said moodily. "I thought I was in love with *her*, four years ago, but I know now, since I have seen you, that it was merely a youthful infatuation! Let me tell you about it!"

Nora's face had paled at this confession; she still kept it averted, and wondered why everything had changed from light to darkness in her heart. He told her of his infatuation with a young woman who had deceived him; she had taken advantage of his love, or passing fancy, to obtain his confidence and then to rob his father.

"She wrote me a scornful note, jeering at me for having been so easily tricked," he concluded bitterly, "and she said that she would not return to England again, and that it was useless for me to attempt to trace her. I vowed that I would never trust another woman, and I have broken that vow. And I am glad that I have broken it! Nora, I will leave you now, to think over what I have said, but I will come again to-morrow!"

When Mrs. Smithers returned she found that Mr. Westmoir was gone, and that Nora had tear-stained eyes, although she declared that she was happy. Mrs. Smithers was puzzled to understand how he could have left the house without her knowing it, seeing that she had been in the kitchen all the while! She must have been very busy indeed!

Nora was well enough to go for letters on the following day, and she found one. She carried it home in triumph, and, once in her room, she opened it; the contents were in the cipher, which she could not properly read.

"I must give it up!" she sighed aloud.

"You mean the packet, I suppose? Certainly, you must give it up!" said a voice behind her.

Nora sprang to her feet with a little scream, to find that a tall, strongly-built, yet well-shaped woman, with features that were attractive and striking, if not beautiful, was standing behind her.

"I followed you home," said the woman, with an amused smile. "I guessed that that advertisement was a trap, and so I hit upon a plan to outwit the decoy duck and the master hand that used it! I am here to get information out of you, and by all that is bad, if you don't tell me where the stones are, I'll kill you!"

"I haven't got the packet!" said Nora, drawing herself up haughtily. She was bound to put a bold face on the matter, but her position was dangerous. Where was Maurice?

"Tell me what happened?" commanded the woman with flashing eyes, and Nora told her.

"You dropped it!" cried the strange woman. "Where is that umbrella?" she demanded suddenly.

"I put it into that cupboard when it was dry, just as it was. I determined to keep it until I could see if anything could be done with it!"

The woman hurried to the cupboard and took out the damaged umbrella. In a moment she had taken from the closed framework a little packet with discoloured wrapping! The fateful packet had somehow slipped into the umbrella and had lain there all the time that Maurice was trying to find it! And then Nora remembered that she had never mentioned that umbrella incident to Maurice, or he might have guessed!

"Ha, ha!" laughed the woman ironically. "Here it is! It is——"

"Mine!" cried a strong voice, and the packet was deftly snatched from her fingers.

With a shrill cry the woman turned

"Maurice!"

"Laura!"

And then the shrinking girl opposite them knew that the former lovers had met again!

"So you have come back again to rob me?" Maurice cried bitterly. "Once before, you fooled me and stole from my father and me, and now——"

"And now," retorted the woman fiercely, interrupting him and turning his words against him, "you have found consolation—there!" And she pointed her finger towards Nora, who instinctively shrank from her, and placed herself by the side of Maurice for protection. He drew her to him with his left hand, and his arm crept round her waist.

"You must tell me where the other stones are," said Maurice decisively. "If you do that you can go free; if not," he added, as she made a defiant gesture, "you go to prison!"

"Never!" screamed the now infuriated woman.

She made a cat-like spring towards the couple, who stood between her and the door, but she recoiled as Maurice released Nora and attempted to seize her wrists. She stood before him with heaving chest and flashing eyes; she wanted to hate him, to strike him down, yet she could not conquer the love that had manifested itself after she had lost him. If she had only been a better woman! Nora saw the expression in her eyes and comprehended it; placing her hand on Maurice's arm, she spoke gently.

"Let her go!" she said. "She has been punished!"

All the hardness and fury died out of the woman's features; she hesitated for a moment to take advantage of Maurice's movement to the side of the room to allow her a free passage out.

"You are right!" she said quietly. "And I deserve it! Make him happy!"

She passed through the door, and they never saw her again.

Maurice urged Nora to marry him at once, but she would not consent; there must be a probation time for both. So they agreed to wait a year, at the end of which time they were happily married.

George Day.

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LOVE THE CONQUEROR.

Showing How True Love Overcame all Obstacles.

THE son of wealthy parents who idolised him, scarcely out of his teens, handsome, with genial spirits that appreciated his good fortune, Ronald White was supremely happy as he sauntered carelessly along that sunny day in May.

Winifred Charters stepped quickly towards him. A tall, graceful girl, hazel-eyed, shy, and beautiful, her silver-tinted Spring costume set off her charms the more. She held out a neatly-gloved hand.

"Yes, I am ten minutes late, I know. But I have finished my shopping, and am free for the afternoon."

"Free," exclaimed Ronald, laughing. "You mean bound to me unconditionally—for the afternoon."

She blushed—a pretty, shell-pink blush—and allowed her lover to draw her hand within his arm.

They walked slowly along, absorbed in each other, yet vaguely conscious of the delicious warmth in the air, the smart costumes of the passing crowd, the glory of the shop windows.

"I ordered my parcels to be sent to the railway station. It is so much pleasanter than to carry them about," said Winnie.

"Of course. And you are sure of finding them at the last minute?"

"Oh, yes. No one ever disappoints me," she returned, a bewitching assurance in her lovely eyes. "But then, you see, I never wait till the very last minute."

"You will have to wait to-night."

"Why?"

"Oh, well, you surrendered to me unconditionally, remember. Besides, I have sent a telegram to your sister, telling her you will not be home till midnight. And I have bought tickets for the theatre. After the performance is over we shall just have time to catch the last train. Won't you like that, Winnie?"

"Yes, very much indeed; but, supposing we lose the train or have no time to get my parcels?"

"Have no fear, dearest. A cabman shall go to the station and procure your packages in advance."

"How thoughtful you are, Ronald. And how easy it is to manage when one has plenty of money."

He winced slightly.

"Why mention that, Winnie? It is not wealth that makes happiness. Should we not be just as happy this afternoon, even without plenty of money?"

"I have no doubt we should be very happy," she replied.

They entered a fashionable restaurant and sat down in a corner before a small table. Winnie had eaten nothing since her breakfast, while it pleased Ronald to order everything that took her fancy. So they ate and chatted with the appetite of youth and the enjoyment of each other's company.

At last Winnie had finished her dessert, and Ronald his coffee.

They were in the street once more, sauntering along in perfect content, pausing now and again to glance into some shop window. Suddenly Ronald stopped before the great glass front of a famous jeweller's.

"I want to buy a little ring for you," he said, "and then we shall just have time to get tea and to reach the theatre."

The young girl blushed.

"Leave the ring till some other time, Ronald. We have had pleasure enough for to-day."

He pressed her hand. There was a tender look in his eyes, but his face was grave.

"I had not meant to buy the ring to-day, dear, but something, somehow, prompts me. I want something very lovely"—taking her hand in his—"to incircle this precious little finger. Bad luck, I'm sure, will follow if I do not put a ring on your finger to-night."

Winnie laughed. "You silly boy. What difference could a ring make?"

The amount of money necessary to secure the ring that took Ronald's fancy almost frightened Winnie. Her lover had been bred to a fortune, she to a pittance. Gratification at any cost was his first impulse, calculation hers.

The purchase over, they had tea, and drove to the theatre.

After the theatre, they hurried to the cab that Ronald had ordered. The parcels were quite safe. In a few minutes they were at the station. Their train was ten minutes behind time, they learnt. Warm as the day had been, the night was cold, and as they paced the platform together, Winnie could not refrain from shivering.

"Winnie, you have no coat, and your dress, how thin! My dear, this is unpardonable!"

"I expected to be home before dark, you know."

"And I have kept you. Heavens! I shall never forgive myself if you take cold—if you become ill."

"Don't worry, dear, I shall not be ill. I have not felt the cold till now. It is nothing."

The train steamed in and they took their seats.

"You'd better hurry up," they heard a porter tell the guard, "or the midnight express'll be after you."

They had a carriage to themselves. Winnie was unmistakably cold. She was shaking violently, her teeth were chattering.

"I must get a rug from somewhere," said Ronald, "next time we stop."

He called to the solitary porter of the sleepy station as the train slowed up.

"A rug, quick, fellow. Guard, you must wait a minute."

"I can't do it," replied the guard. "I'm already behind time."

Ronald ignored him, and turned to the porter.

"There's a rug in the master's room," said the excited porter, "but he's gone home, and the door's locked. This is the room, sir."

"Here, lend us your weight," cried Ronald, slipping half a sovereign into the man's hand. The two men threw themselves against the door.

The guard went to the edge of the platform and listened along the track with bated breath. He was well acquainted with his passenger. It was very risky waiting—even for a minute. He would not have waited for any ordinary person.

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but a White—why, was not the boy's father, Sir Ronald White, a director of the company? There was no sound or sign of the express yet. It was perilous work, but he had run just as close before and got through safe. Though they had gained three minutes, they were still nine behind. He would give young White another minute, and try to make up the lost time by crowding on more steam.

A few passengers put their heads out of the windows and grumbled at the delay, but so far as the eye could see the track behind them was dark and silent.

The guard moved towards his van. He placed one foot on the step.

"I can't wait any longer, sir," he shouted.

At that moment there was a resounding smash as the station master's door flew suddenly inwards. A second later Ronald appeared with the rug in his grasp.

"Go ahead, guard," he cried almost breathlessly, as he leapt towards the now moving train.

Ten minutes and a half behind! The express was due there in two minutes!

Ronald staggered with the rug towards Winnie.

"My dear Ron, you should not have troubled," she said.

He drew close to her and slipped his arm about her waist. This was a new intoxication, this feeling which had come over him since she had worn his ring. She was his—his very own.

"How tired you must be, darling."

Winnie looked at him tenderly. "But we are almost home now, dearest," she said wearily.

"Yes, dear," drawing her a little closer, clasping her a little tighter—"yes—our day—is——"

"Heavens, Ronald!"

There was a shriek of terror from the girl's voice. Then a fearful crash and rending, the screaming of whistles, and all was darkness. The train was invaded by a fiend, the scalding water deluging the miserable inmates, the red coals, like horrible hailstones, falling about them. There came a terrific swaying and a sudden stop. Then, save for the groans of the injured and the hiss of escaping steam, there was a dreadful silence. The midnight express had run into the train.

* * * * *

Winifred Charters recovered consciousness in the cool May daybreak in her own room. Her sister was moving softly about, picking up scattered garments—the spoilt and torn pieces of the pretty costume in which Winnie had gone to the city the previous day. Instantly the terrible scenes of the previous night came back to her. She sighed.

"Am I hurt much, Lucy?"

"Your face and neck are scalded, dear. The doctor thinks not very seriously."

"Scalded? Then I shall be scarred! Was Ronald hurt?"

"Yes."

"Not killed, Lucy—not killed?" cried Winnie.

"No, dear. There is an injury to the hip-joint. They have sent to the West End for surgeons. Nothing can be known positively till they arrive."

Winnie lifted her hands.

"My ring," she cried wildly. "My lovely ring. It is gone."

"What ring, Winnie?"

"Of course you don't know, Lucy. Yesterday Ronald bought me a ring—oh, such an exquisite and costly ring. And now it is lost or someone has stolen it." Winnie sobbed into her hands.

"It is not impossible," said her sister. "The confusion was frightful. It was past midnight before I got there. We could not find you and Ronald for an hour."

Winnie shuddered.

"What an awful termination to that happy day!"

"Poor child! It was a happy day, then?"

"Oh, so happy, Lucy!"

"And Ronald gave you a ring, you say. Did he ask you definitely to marry him?"

There was a slight pause.

"Well, I don't think he did in just so many words, but it was the same thing."

"No, Winnie, it is not the same thing," said the elder girl decidedly, with a sigh. "A man who wants a girl for his wife will ask her plainly to marry him."

"Ronald wants to marry me, I'm positive. But you see, Lucy, we are very young to think of marrying yet. And, Lucy, we do love each other dearly. That is enough for the present, surely?"

Lucy Charters turned to the window to wipe the tears from her eyes.

"Winnie, I cannot see you suffer," she exclaimed. "You are too dear to me. Anything that grieved you would kill me. That is why I am so anxious about your relationship with Ronald White. When I received the telegram stating that you were staying in town till the last train, such a weight oppressed my heart that the news of the accident scarcely made it heavier. I could not bear to have you stay. And I wish you had not taken the ring till you were definitely engaged."

Winnie sighed.

"But the ring is gone. We may never be engaged now, Lucy."

"If we were situated differently, if we had a father or a brother, or if we were wealthy, Ronald White would have declared his passion before now. Has he not been wooing you for more than a year? But you have nothing except your pretty face, and he is not the first man who has ventured to trifle with a girl, who was pretty, poor, and unprotected."

"Nothing could persuade me, Lucy, that Ronald's heart is not the seat of honour. He could not be more tender to me were I a princess. You do not know how he left the train at Langley to get me a rug!"

The elder sister shook her head. Counsel or reflection seemed alike idle with the lovers separated as they were, on beds of sickness, and with the shadow of death between them. Try as she would, she could not convince herself that Ronald White, rich, brilliant, with so great a future before him, really loved her sister for herself alone. But she would never tell her that.

"I must leave you now, dear," she said. "Perhaps you will sleep when the room is quiet."

Lucy drew the blinds together before the dormer windows of the little country villa, straightened the sheets, arranged the bandages that swathed the girl's face and throat, and went lightly away.

As soon as she was alone Winnie hid her face in her hands and cried bitterly. Her poor, burnt face. If she were disfigured, would Ronald still love her? What awful things Lucy had said! They could not be true. They were the outgrowth of Lucy's own disappointed life. And she and Ronald had had such a happy day. What a miserable end!

Meanwhile, in the luxurious bedroom of the great house to which he had been carried, Ronald White lay pale and still. Though it was not yet daybreak, everyone in the house was about, speaking in whispers, and treading softly. One after another they came and went—father and mother and sisters—in mute suspense, to look at their darling and wander away, or to glance eagerly down the carriage-drive for the sound of wheels which would tell them of the arrival of the surgeons for whom they had telegraphed, and upon whose verdict hung the life and well-being of their cherished, only son.

Eight o'clock came at last, and with it the famous physicians. There was a long, thorough examination, an anxious consultation. They carried the result to Sir Ronald White. His son's life was not in immediate danger. But—— Well, he would be lame for life, and, more likely than not, an invalid.

"Save my boy's life," cried the anguished father, "only save his life!"

* * * * *

It was the end of June. The roses had bloomed and faded; the merry songsters, with their newly-hatched young, had flown away; the corn had ripened, and the grass grown tall—

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just as if no incident of human misery had come to mar the harmony of the lapsing hours.

Winifred Charters was up and about the house. She had escaped wonderfully from accident, everyone said. No scars disfigured her sweet, fair face, only a slight redness which a few months would remove. She was alone this day. Lucy had gone out on a mission, the thought of which kept the younger sister's heart in a flutter of expectation. She had gone to see Ronald White.

And how had it fared with the handsome young fellow? He had passed through fearful suffering. The fractured bones of the injured joint had been set, and were slowly knitting. Illness had left its mark upon him. He was feverish, peevish, and despondent. Upon this particular morning he awoke early from unrefreshing sleep. The doctors were to visit him at ten o'clock, and he had been promised, should his condition be favourable, that he might sit up for a little while in a reclining chair specially procured for him.

The moment he stirred from his sleep his elder sister stepped from the adjoining room which had been occupied by one or other of the family since Ronald had met with his injury. The White girls were three in number—proud, cold girls, never beautiful, no longer young, but animated with a feeling common among girls in similar families. They almost worshipped their only brother. His present prostrate position gave them the opportunity they so much desired. Never before had they been privileged to coddle and humour him as their hearts craved.

Agnes White stepped lightly in, bringing a costly china bowl of warm water for her brother's toilet. Then she returned again with a tiny tray, upon whose damask cloth was spread his breakfast. All the time she had not spoken. It irritated Ronald to be frequently asked if he were better. He pushed away the food.

"It is nearly ten," he exclaimed. "I will wait till the doctors come. Perhaps I may sit up to eat my breakfast."

Agnes took her seat in silence.

"I hear the carriage," she presently said.

A faint flush mounted to Ronald's cheeks.

"I shall die here," he cried irritably, "if they do not let me get up."

Perhaps the surgeons thought the same. Anyway, they gave permission for him to be cautiously lifted to the cushioned chair, placed by the window. Ronald's hungry eyes devoured the scene without—the trimly-kept lawn, the garden with its multi-coloured flowers, its pleasant fragrances.

"Who would have thought a month ago," he murmured bitterly, "that I should be thankful even to sit here, a crippled prisoner?"

"My dear boy," said his mother, "be grateful that it is no worse."

"We must have a little festival in honour of the occasion," interposed Agnes White, with an attempt at gaiety. "What shall we do in celebration?"

"Give the school-children a strawberry feast out here on the lawn, eh, Ronald, where you could watch them?"

"That would indeed be delightful," returned the invalid with supreme irony.

"Pray, mother, let Ronald make his own proposals."

"Why, of course, Agnes, if the dear boy has any desire, we shall be only too pleased to gratify it. I only suggested something to divert his mind."

"My mind doesn't need diversion, mother, and if you want a celebration, Agnes, please have it on the other side of the house. What I wish you to do is to send a message at once to Miss Winifred Charters. Tell her that I have left my bed, and should like her to come to see me. Send the carriage with the message, and tell the coachman to wait till she is ready."

There was a dead silence.

"Did you not understand me?" continued Ronald presently, his eyes closed, his lips compressed.

"Certainly, dear, of course. I was just going to write the note," and Agnes rose, beckoning to her mother to follow her from the room.

"You see?" whispered Lady White.

"Hush, mother dear. Let me manage him alone."

"He will marry her in spite of you. You see, she is his first thought."

Agnes did not stop to hear her mother's forebodings. Procuring her writing-case, she returned to her brother.

"Ronald," she said after a little hesitation, her pen suspended in the air, "I wish you were able to write this message."

"I wish I were."

"Because I think Miss Charters will scarcely like coming to see you, so conspicuously, you know, in our carriage, unless, of course, she comes as your affianced wife."

"You can consider that she comes in that position."

"You became engaged to her, then, that day?"

"I don't know, Agnes," replied Ronald, almost angrily, "that I am bound to explain my private affairs to you or to anyone else. I intend marrying Winifred Charters. Be good enough to send for her."

Agnes White's heart gave a little bound. They were not positively engaged yet, then. Her brother would have said so.

"But, my dear Ronald," her pen still trembled above the page, "of course I'm going to send for Miss Charters, but a disappointment just now would be *so* bad for you. I want you to reflect, my dear Ron, that she may not come. In the first place, she has not been out yet; she may not be able to drive so far; a sense of delicacy may prevent her; and again, my poor darling, a month has changed you greatly. Is Winifred Charters the kind of girl who would or would not be affected by this change? Dear, dear Ron, life has a very different outlook, at the very best, from what it had a month ago. Your riding, dancing, and similar amusements—all are done with. You have nothing better than this invalid's chair to look forward to, perhaps for years."

Her brother waved his hand wearily.

"Dear, precious boy," continued his lecturer, "who is going to make you happiest? I would not say these things did I not know they must have occurred to you. I am going to write now to Miss Charters, but tell me, before I bring her, is it fair to bind her to a prolonged engagement dependent upon your capricious recovery? Could you expect to fulfil the hopes you have inspired while wooing her? She has dreamt, no doubt, of being your wife, the wife of a wealthy, handsome young man; she has looked forward to a brilliant social position—to a life of gaiety, admiration, dress, and display. Tied to this chair, could you expect her to spend her life happily beside it? Could you be happy in merely supplying the means for her enjoyment in which you could not share?"

Miss White ceased. She told herself that desperate diseases required desperate remedies; that she was cruel in order to be kind.

Her brother leant his head upon his hand and closed his eyes.

"My poor Ronald, have I wearied you?"

"You have."

The tone was dejected. Miss White knew that the shots had told. She dipped her pen in the ink and wrote:

"MY DEAR MISS CHARTERS,—*My brother is sitting up for the first time to-day. He desires to see you, and has asked me to send the carriage, hoping that, if you are able, you will do him the favour of driving over to see him. Allow me to beg you to have no scruples as to the propriety of your doing so. After the frightful accident to which you and my brother were subjected, nothing could be more natural than that you should wish to compare your experiences. Use your own convenience as to time. The coachman has directions to await your orders.—Very truly,* "AGNES WHITE."

Her brother read the note and nodded an approval. There was nothing to object to; he could ask no more; but it galled him.

Winifred Charters took the note herself from the coachman's hand at the door. She turned a little pale as she read it, then handed it to her sister.

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"What shall I do about it, Lucy?"

Lucy's lip curled.

"Can you ask?" she said with a fine scorn. "Will you subject yourself to such humiliating condescension?"

"Miss White is always hard and cold."

"True, but listen to what she says: 'You are to feel no scruples of delicacy,' you are not to come shyly, as you might if you and her brother were properly engaged. Nothing will be thought of your visit by anybody. It will not warrant the assumption of any engagement. How careful she is! You are not for a moment to suppose that they sent the carriage because they regard you as Ronald's future wife."

"But Ronald did not write this."

"No, but he saw the note, of course. He may even have suggested that clause, fearing you might suppose he wished to make his declaration. It is merely as a fellow sufferer that he wishes to see you."

"Then I will not go."

"My brave darling! That is your wisest decision."

"How shall I decline, Lucy?"

The elder sister sat thoughtful for a few moments.

"Say," she said finally, "that it is not thought advisable for you to drive so far quite yet—it is more than two miles, you know. And say how thankful and happy you are that Ronald is able to sit up, and that I shall come over in the course of the day to congratulate him."

"You, Lucy?"

"Yes. And if he has anything to say, he will say it to me."

Poor Winnie wrote her note with pale cheeks and tearful eyes.

"Am I to go home without you, miss?" asked the coachman, when Winnie gave the note to him.

"Certainly."

"Mr. Ronald will be upset, miss. He would have me bring the horses round to see before I started. It's the first thing he's seemed to care about."

Miss Charters bowed gravely and closed the door.

"I did not think she would come to such a summons," declared Ronald, when the messenger returned.

Miss White thought the matter over carefully.

"She will not come, Ronald, unless it is as your betrothed wife. Her motive is obvious."

"Winnie feels herself to be my future wife, Agnes. She wears my ring upon her finger."

He saw his ring was not upon her hand.

"If love was her only motive, Ronald, I should not be surprised if the change which has come over you lately would not alter even her affection. But if she has other motives, if it is your money which tempts her, she will still desire to marry you."

A hot flush mounted to the young man's face.

"Agnes," he cried, "I'm ashamed of you. You shall not poison my mind against her. Leave me instantly!"

Miss White went humbly away. Desperate diseases required desperate remedies. Her brother should not marry Winifred Charters with her pretty face and fascinating ways and her scheming tricks—if she could prevent it.

Nothing came of Lucy Charters' visit to Hollybush Towers, the Whites' residence. She was taken to Ronald's room where, in an atmosphere made oppressive by the presence of the three Miss Whites, she made a brief, cold call. She was truly shocked by the change in Ronald, and her endeavours to conceal her feelings were set down to duplicity.

She was glad when the end came and she was out once more in the leafy lanes where she could have her cry out. It would never do, she argued, to tell Winnie the actual truth—the poor, broken-hearted Winnie, who wandered about the little rooms through the cool hours of the summer afternoon in a feverish anxiety for her sister's return.

"My poor Winnie!" were Lucy's first words. "Ronald White will be a helpless cripple and fretful invalid all his life. He wants a strong, patient nurse, not a beautiful young wife. If you were engaged to him ten times over, it would be wiser to give him up."

"Give him up, Lucy? I never will—until some other woman has a stronger claim upon him than I. My poor, darling Ronald!"

"Oh, Winnie. Has his money so strong a fascination? It would not make you happy."

"His money!" retorted the younger sister with scorn. "I care nothing for his money. Would to Heaven that he were poor, that I might marry him, and work for him, and nurse him—to prove how dearly I love him."

And Winifred dropped her fair head and cried long and bitterly.

One day Winnie heard some news. The Whites were going abroad. It was the end of August now, and the outward

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traces of her accident were almost effaced. But she was drooping and pale. It would take a long time, the doctor declared, before she entirely recovered from the nervous shock. Had she been a wealthy patient, he would have prescribed change of air and scene. But as the Charters girls had only their little home and a small income with which to maintain it, it was useless to propose expensive remedies.

Week had succeeded week since the morning when Sir Ronald White's coachman had come in pomp on his fruitless errand, and no further communication had reached Winnie from her lover.

In reality, with an invalid's morbid judgment, and with the ever active poison of his sister's words distilling in his brain, Ronald was angry with her. He considered she ought to have come to see him. For her to stay away looked to him like prudishness. Perhaps, however, she was so truly shocked at his changed prospects that she wished never to see him again. Or, perhaps, it was as his sister had said—but, no, he would not believe that. So the days wearily passed, and his faith in the sweet girl who loved him so tenderly grew weaker and weaker.

Nevertheless, he gained in strength, and the doctors advised his removal to some medicinal springs at the earliest possible moment.

"And if one place doesn't agree with him, try another," said the great man from Harley Street. "The great thing is to keep him cheerful. Give him whatever he asks for."

One of the young autocrat's first steps was to dethrone his sisters. He would have a competent male nurse—a professional nurse who would take orders and obey them. He would no longer stand a crowd of hysterical women about him worrying his life away with their idiotic notions. Alas! for fraternal gratitude!

So a nurse was appointed and preparations were made to depart. Ronald was taking his own carriage with him, into which he could be lifted at ease and when all was arranged for the journey to the railway station, he called to his nurse and valet.

"Tell the man," he said, "to drive me over to Miss Charters!"

The man touched his hat. It was not for him to suggest that in doing so they would most likely lose the train.

The carriage stopped before the door. Without a moment's preparation, Winifred Charters found herself suddenly called upon to meet her lover. What could she say? What would he say? The two servants could not avoid hearing whatever they said.

"We little thought, Winnie, how long it would be before we met again," said the invalid sadly, holding out his hand.

"Little indeed! Are you better? You are going away?"

"Yes," more sadly still. "I have only stopped for a moment to say 'Good-bye.'"

"Good-bye. May you regain your health while you are away."

"My health will never be what it was."

"It may. You must look on the bright side for your friends' sake."

"Yes," he said.

He released her hand. His ring was not on it, he saw. And what conventional phrases she uttered; and how stately and unmoved she looked at him! But how beautiful she was—more than ever, he thought—so marble pale, with heavenly eyes, and the fair, shining hair that reflected the glory of the sun.

Oh, how Winnie wished to tell him the thoughts of her heart. But she must not appear to detain him. She stepped backwards when he released her hand. Not for anything would she let the attendant see her agitated at parting from the man who had been her lover for more than a year, the man who was leaving her now like any chance acquaintance.

"Please drive on," said Ronald quietly. "I thought to see your sister, Winnie. You will say 'Good-bye' for me?"

"Her good wishes," replied the girl, "will follow you with mine."

For an instant there was a wild, pathetic intreaty in his eyes. He must not go without—— She lifted her arms. Her lips parted. The horses stirred and the carriage moved. He was gone. Then, unable to control herself longer, she flew up the stairs to her tiny room and flung herself upon the bed, crying passionately.

The chilly autumnal twilight came on soon.

Lucy Charters was much concerned about her sister. Day by day she grew paler and more spiritless. Hope had left her life. Winnie folded her hands in listless apathy.

"Winnie, dear," said Lucy cheerfully, one morning. "I have a plan. I want you to accept Mrs. Delamere's invitation this winter."

"Oh, I couldn't. She only invites me because the children are fond of me. There is too much gaiety at her house for me."

"Well, the children won't hurt you; and if Mrs. Delamere does like gaiety, she is a bright, wholesome, sensible woman; she is just the tonic you need."

"And you, Lucy?"

"Well, this is my plan. I have had the offer of three boarders—the Ives girls and their father. I shall want your room for his study. Next summer we will go to some quiet seaside resort and spend the proceeds of my speculation."

Winnie sighed. She had not the spirit to remonstrate. A month or two later saw her staying with busy little Mrs. Delamere, forced, in spite of herself, to take an interest in the doings of the world. Mrs. Delamere did not understand the meaning of love-sick.

Slowly Winnie began to recuperate—both in body and heart. By degrees she began to forget how the whole world had seemed to slip out of view when she lost sight of Ronald White's carriage. Mrs. Delamere took her with her everywhere. She met nice women and agreeable men. She no longer cried on her pillow nightly. This, then, was her love test. This was the crucible in which her rejected love was to be proven.

Lucy Charters' speculation was successful. The Ives were profitable boarders. The girls were teachers, clever, and easily satisfied. Their father, unlike most bookworms and literary men, was seldom irritable. Lucy's housekeeping abilities made them more comfortable than they had ever been before.

When July came again, and with it the time for the projected stay at a quiet seaside watering-place, Lucy could hardly get free from her paying guests. Finally it was agreed that the Ives should remain and manage as best they could till Lucy's return.

"But Winnie is coming back with me," objected Lucy. "Your father could not dispense with his study."

Mr. Ives overheard them.

"My dear Miss Charters," he said cheerily. "'Sufficient unto the day,' you know. By the time your holiday is over we will make other arrangements."

Lucy and Winnie were at the seaside—the elder sister enjoying a well-deserved rest, the younger sister drifting along the current of such enjoyments as youth and beauty command even against one's will. She had many admirers—whom she neither encouraged nor repulsed.

Amid the train that followed her footsteps was a last winter's acquaintance—one Walter Grainger, a middle-aged successful stockbroker. His preference pleased her more than any other man she knew. He was no flatterer, but always thoughtful and attentive. Possibly she liked him. Yet when Lucy said: "Mr. Grainger is in love with you," she sneered that love was old-fashioned, and ridiculed the idea.

Lucy was right, however, though his declaration came sooner than she expected. Mr. Grainger had been telegraphed for, but the night before he left he asked Winnie to walk with him along the beach. It was a lovely moonlight night, and the conversation flowed into many topics as they wandered idly along the silvery sands. They seemed almost too good friends to behave like lovers.

A little boat lay high on the sands under the shelter of a cliff. They sat down in it, and in silence watched the long

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lines of waves as they rolled in glittering lengths and broke upon the sands.

"Miss Charters," said Mr. Grainger, at last, almost abruptly, "I have brought you to this spot this evening for a special purpose—to ask you to be my wife."

Winnie started violently. She had been thinking of Ronald White. She covered her face with her hands.

"Oh, why, why, do you ask me?"

"Why?"—taking her cold hands in his. "Why, dearest? Because I love you more tenderly than a whole life of devotion can make you aware of; because you are so dear and so precious to me that I want you for my very own."

He looked long and earnestly into the pale, fair face.

She could not repress a shiver.

"I wish you did not. I shall never marry anyone, Mr. Grainger."

He smiled. The remark seemed childish to him.

"I have been too abrupt, perhaps. I can wait and win your love patiently. We will talk of it no more to-night." Winnie was trembling with agitation.

"No — oh, no! We must end it here, Mr. Grainger. I have nothing to give — no affection to give anyone. My heart was bestowed on a man who did not want it. I shall never love again. Do not mistake me — I shall never alter."

Something came to the ears of both in the silence that followed—something like a moan. It must have been the tide or the wind among the rocks.

Walter Grainger stepped out of the boat.

"I would not willingly have pained you, Miss Charters. We may still be friends, I hope?"

She pressed his hand as he assisted her on to the sands. It was still early when they reached the hotel.

Mr. Grainger bade her "Good-bye." Lucy was playing cards.

Without being observed, she slipped out once more in the moonlight and retraced her steps. A shadow fell on the sands—not her own—and made her start.

It was a peculiar shadow! It was that of a man supported by crutches. Half alarmed, she turned suddenly and found herself face to face with Ronald White! Biting her lip, to check her emotion, she stood still before him.

"Is this my welcome, Winnie?"

The pathos in his voice dissolved her coldness. She uttered a cry and put out her hands. They were near the boat. By mutual instinct they approached it and took their seats.

"I heard every word just now, Winnie."

"You heard, then, what was not intended for your hearing. You have no right to recall it"

She turned suddenly and found herself face to face with Ronald White!

"Oh, Winnie, you are like ice to me. I would not recall it only that I am prevented from asking what, having heard from your lips, my soul yearns to do."

"You speak enigmas."

"Perhaps. And yet you understand that what I yearn for is your love, and what I am prevented from asking for is your hand."

"I understand nothing. There was no need to mention it."

"Do you not understand, Winnie, what it is that prevents me?"

"I know nothing of your reasons."

"Oh, Winnie, what but poverty could prevent me from speaking now?"

"Poverty?"

"Yes, Winnie. My wealth is gone. Shattered in body, ruined in purse, what right have I to ask you to share my lot?"

"What right?" she echoed. "Love does not scruple about rights."

"Love! Winnie, you do not love me now. You loved me strong and prosperous, but maimed and poor——"

"Ronald, Ronald, stop! I do love you!"

"My darling"—drawing her to his breast. "How I have wronged you."

Ronald White's story of his poverty, however, was a fiction. He had promised his sister that in this way he would test his darling's sincerity.

A year had passed away, but he had failed to forget her, and he had determined not to rest till he found her and offered his love.

Lucy went home to prepare for the wedding.

"After all, Mr. Ives," she said, "Winnie will not want her room."

"Ah, I thought so. But, you see, Miss Charters, I have already made other arrangements."

"Other arrangements," replied Lucy. "Whatever do you mean, Mr. Ives? Have you arranged to go somewhere else. I hope not."

"No, my dear, I want to stay here for always. I want you to marry me."

Lucy was not fluttered in the least. She smiled, and a slight flush tinged her cheeks not unbecomingly. She held out her hands to him and said:

"Thank you, Mr. Ives. I am quite willing to marry you."

And she did.

J. G. Jones.

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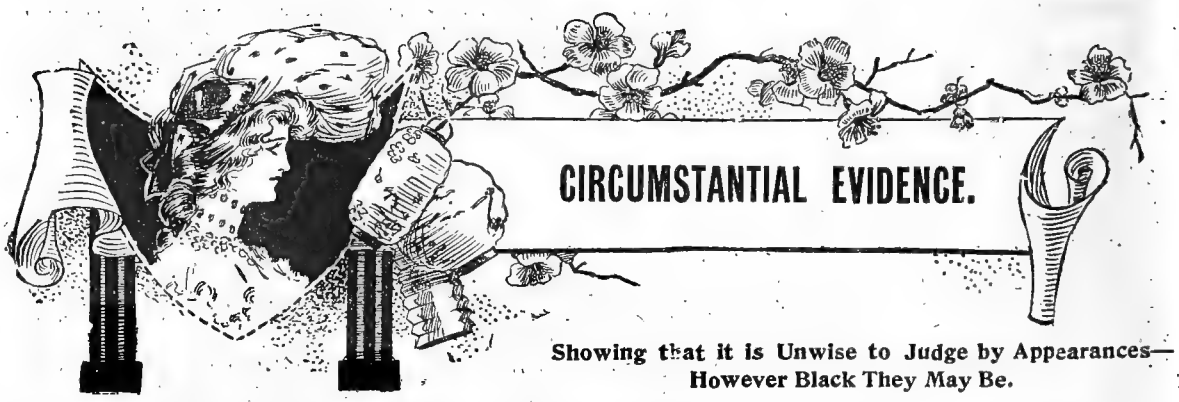

CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE.

Showing that it is Unwise to Judge by Appearances—However Black They May Be.

ROBERT MALCOLM had never been called "Bob" by anyone until his recently-acquired wife, with a coquettish pretence of shyness, had so addressed him. He was a man with a great heart and a simple, kindly soul, whom early struggles had made reticent, and uncultured environment, awkward. Since success, by dint of hard work and boundless energy, had crowned his efforts, and he had become a wealthy and influential man, his reticence and awkwardness had been mistaken for pride and coldness.

He had no close associates, and his wife was the only person between whom and himself there had ever existed the least semblance of love. He could not recall that he had ever particularly desired anyone to call him "Bob," but after she had once pronounced the familiar nickname he had clung to the sound of it, had been thrilled at the remembrance of it and wondered why he had never thought of suggesting to any of his acquaintances that they should address him by that attractive name.

He had known his wife but a short time when he won her by his masterful wooing, which surprised no one so much as himself. He knew little of her past, and cared less. It was enough for him that he loved her, and that she had said that she loved him.

And now, at the end of six blissful months, he was sitting in his splendid library, perplexed and miserable, gloomily eyeing the embers of a grate fire, and trying to persuade himself that the shadow which threatened to wreck his future could be explained away if only he had the courage to ask her.

On coming home that afternoon he had gone to her sitting-room, the dainty furnishing of which was so subtly suggestive of her taste, and had found it empty. Turning to leave, he had seen a piece of note paper lying on the floor as though it had been brushed off her desk as she rose in a hurry. In stooping to replace it, his eye had caught two words, the beginning of a letter—"Dear Tom." Dear Tom! Could it be that there was a dear Tom in her life of whom he knew nothing? He knew she had no brothers and no cousins. He did not try to resist the temptation to read the letter, so he did that which reduced him to abject misery.

The letter read:

"DEAR TOM,—If I were to be asked why I am writing to you, I should have to admit that I am yielding to an impulse. My whole life has been made up of impulses, and I never battled with them but once—alas, the very time I *should* have yielded! You will know what I mean—that night you renounced me—renounced me while your blood was on fire with love for me, which I knew and felt and revelled in—when your eyes dumbly begged me to refuse to be renounced, and your lips told me it would be better to part. Ah, if I had only yielded then to the impulse to tell you I loved you well enough to share your poverty and the task of caring for your poor, helpless old father!

"How well I remember that dear, delightful, *cruel* summer in Dorking! Mother had scraped and saved that I might disguise our poverty, and so not disgrace Aunt Sarah, who, as you know, was a great stickler for appearances. When I bade the poor, shabby, unselfish mother 'Good-bye,' and started off in my new finery, I hated myself for my selfishness, but when once I was behind the beautiful, unsympathetic walls of Aunt Sarah's domain, I was small enough to be glad that I was sailing under false colours and wearing clothes to which I had no right. And so I shut my eyes to the mental vision of mother in her shabby clothes, with her tear-dimmed eyes and her work-worn fingers. Oh, mother, mother, whose beautiful wrinkled old hands I saw last folded peacefully across your breast! Forgive me, Tom—in thinking of her whose life was one long sacrifice I forget everything.

"Well—*you* came, dear, and you stepped into my heart with that first smile on your brave, sunny face. Then, afterwards, Aunt Sarah, when I told her of our betrothal, said in her icy, sneering tones, 'I congratulate you upon your discretion. It is a fitting thing that you should marry Tom Spencer, and let your early poverty be merged into middle-aged and elderly poverty. As Tom Spencer's wife you will have the satisfaction of knowing that you have before you such a life as your mother has led, only intensified, since *your* life will be encumbered by his helpless, paralytic old father.

"Tom dear, do not utterly despise me when I tell you that her words had their weight. I did not fear the poverty, for I knew you were bound to succeed, if only, dear one, you were not hampered in your career by your father. I knew you were fond of him, and that while he lived you would keep him with you—that even *I* could not influence you to send him away. So when you told me we had better part, I offered no protestation. I knew your heart was aching, and that you needed comforting words from me. I knew I had to speak only one word to break down the barrier, and have you take me to your heart for ever. I did not speak that word. Though my heart cried out to you that I could not leave you, that I loved you well enough to share your burden, I did not speak that word.

"I am married now. My husband loves me, and I am rich, beyond my fondest expectation. I have all those things which my luxurious and expensive tastes craved—yet I am not happy! Better indeed—

A book of verses underneath the bough,
A jug of wine, a loaf of bread—and thou
Beside me singing in the wilderness—
The wilderness was Paradise enow!

"This is my farewell, dear one. You know now—every word in this letter has told you—what you are to me. Yet you will not misunderstand—you will not come to me.

"It is over, Tom, and——"

Here the writing ended abruptly.

Robert Malcolm was a loyal man, and even though the evidence was against her, he refused to believe his wife guilty of all that the letter implied. He told himself that if he dared to ask her for an explanation, she would give it, and it would be satisfactory. If he dared! To ask her would be to confess

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a dishonourable act, and also to confess a lack on confidence in her.

He tried to formulate explanations in his own head—tried to imagine that he had no cause for the misery which was gnawing at his heart strings; but always he came back to the point where he started, with the wretched conviction that his wife loved another man staring him in the face.

While he was sitting there the door opened noiselessly. A slight, girlish figure stole across the thick carpet and behind his chair. Two soft, small hands were clasped before his eyes, and a voice whispered:

"Guess who it is!"

His heart gave a great bound, and he took the hands down and kissed them. Then he drew her down to the arm of the chair, where her face was on a level with his own, and solemnly and silently looked into her eyes for a long time before he spoke. Finally, as if satisfied with what he saw there, he asked:

"Have you been shopping?"

She seemed surprised at the trivial question following so closely upon the scrutiny she had undergone, and said:

"Is that all, Mr. Bluebeard? Gracious, how you scared me! I expected to hear you say in sepulchral tones, 'Woman there is guilt in your face—where have you hidden the body?' And instead, after that soul-searching gaze, you ask the common-place question in common-place tones, 'Have you been shopping?'"

With a sigh of content and love and relief, he threw his arms round her and drew her close to him for a moment. Then she seated herself opposite him in a low chair, where the firelight fell on her face, bringing out all its charm. It was an attractive face, with ever-varying expression, delicate in contour and colouring, with a rather insignificant nose, a red mouth ever ready to curve into gracious smiles, and big, wondrous grey eyes which glowed and darkened with emotion, and were shaded by heavy dark lashes. The whole was overtopped with a mass of rippling chestnut hair, with a glint of gold upon it.

In the magnetism of her presence her husband became almost happy once more—until the memory of that letter came back to sting him.

As he watched her face, he decided to try some judicious questioning, hoping to elicit the information which he longed, yet feared, to possess. She had been describing some poor woman she had seen and materially aided that day, and when she had finished he asked her suddenly:

"Adèle, were you ever in Dorking?"

She opened wide her eyes and answered:

"No, dear—why do you ask?"

"Just curiosity." Then, after a pause, during which he studied the fire and she studied him, he added: "Did you ever know a man named Tom Spencer?"

She laughed softly, and folding her dainty hands replied:

"Now am I indeed on the rack. Why torture my innocent soul with the curiosity to know your reason for placing me in the witness-box?"

At her irrelevant answer his doubts rose again, and he rather sternly repeated his question, with a request for a direct reply.

"Tom Spencer—Tom Spencer—where have I seen or heard that name?" she queried softly, as if to herself. "I certainly don't know any Tom Spencer, but I believe I have heard the name somewhere."

This puzzled while it relieved him.

"And now, you dear, cross ogre, are there any more conundrums for me? Because, if you have finished, I will go and dress for dinner; and I would advise you to do the same, instead of sitting there and letting the fire bake your brain. If you don't look out, your Tom Smith, or Tom What's-his-name, will take possession of your poor wits."

He laughed responsively, and watched her disappear through the door; then to himself he said:

"What a fool I was to doubt her! But the letter—pshaw! I will think no more of it." So saying, he took her advice and went to dress for dinner.

A month passed, and during this time Robert Malcolm tried to detect a flaw in his wife's devotion, to justify him in the doubt which would creep in whenever he thought of that letter. Try as he might, he could not rid himself of the unsavoury recollection. But it was in vain that he sought an explanation in her manner. There was nothing about her to suggest that wealth had palled upon her, or that without poverty and Tom Spencer her life was a blank. She was, as ever, airily affectionate, daintily tyrannical, flippant, and serious in one breath, with that "infinite variety" which was her greatest charm.

One night, when they had returned from a dance, he decided to make a full confession to her, and to ask for an explanation. She had thrown herself into an easy chair, and looked even fairer than usual. She was pale from fatigue, and there were shadows about her lustrous eyes which only intensified her loveliness.

Making a final effort he began, and rapidly he told her all—all about the letter, his doubts and despair, and the unhappiness he felt whenever he had thought of the matter.

While he was talking, she was looking down and twisting the rings on her slender fingers. When he finished she looked up at him with a slow, amused smile creeping over her face.

"Now I understand those questions you asked me about Tom Spencer. Yes, that was the name—and I know now why the name seemed familiar to me."

She paused musingly, and he said hurriedly and hopefully:

"Well, what of Tom Spencer? Who is he?"

"He is a creature of my own imagination; and once having created Thomas, I straightway forgot him. When you asked me that day, I wondered where I had heard the name."

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

"Only this, Bob—but first you must promise not to laugh at me." She stopped, looking at him anxiously. He nodded impatiently, and she went on. "Some time ago I conceived the idea of being literary. I thought out a story, and decided that I would depart from the usual routine and have it told in a series of letters. You got hold of the beginning of the story. I was called away that day, and never thought again of my literary venture."

He drew her up to him, and then, with his arms round her, he asked in a husky whisper:

"Adèle, will you forgive me?"

For answer she put her arms round his neck and then replied softly:

"If you'll promise never to doubt me again."

The promise and the forgiveness were consummated in one long kiss.

* * * * *

A week later, in a Surrey paper, Robert Malcolm happened upon the following:

Dorking, April 23rd.—Mr. William Spencer, an old and respected citizen of this city, died yesterday afternoon. The deceased had long been a sufferer from paralysis, but his death was unexpected. He leaves one son, Mr. Thomas Spencer, with whom he lived, to mourn his loss.

Esther Maynes.

ARE YOU IN LOVE?

If so, you will be sure to want to know the best kind of present to give your *fiancé* or *fiancée*, whichever the case may be. More important than this, though, is for you to know if you are really suited to each other, and are likely to be happy if you marry. If you want to know this you should each of you send a specimen of your handwriting, together with six penny stamps and a stamped, addressed envelope, to Ranee, 23 Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C., in return for which you will each receive an accurate delineation of your character, from which, by comparing the two, you will be able to draw all the conclusions necessary.

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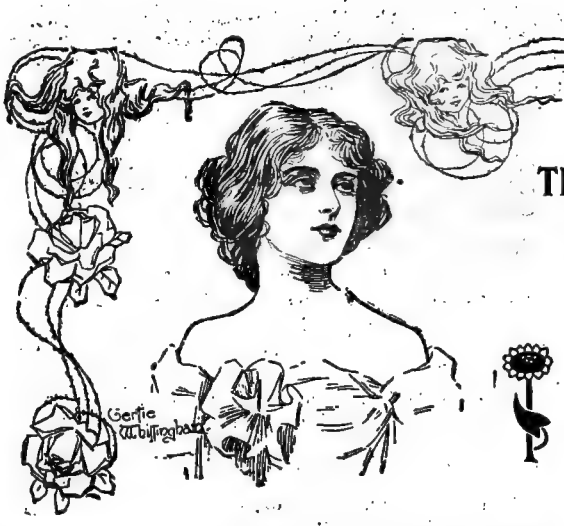

THE COURTING OF MONICA.

Telling of a True and a False Lover.

ALTHOUGH the little village of Olden was beginning to look bright with the green of early Spring, down here on the beach all was grey—sands, rocks, sky, even the water had the same dreary tint. Not a gleam of other colour, except that of the crimson shawl, which the girl, sitting on a ledge of rock, had wrapped round her.

Laurence Dare, coming along the road which ran along above the beach, saw the patch of red and paused.

At sight of her Dare's heart had given a great throb of joy. It was so long, so long since he had seen her. He made a few strides and stood beside her.

"Monica," he said softly.

The girl turned her head with a quick movement.

"Oh, Laurence."

There was a displeased tone in her voice, and her brows came together in a frown as she regarded him.

After a silence of some moments, which Dare spent in devouring eagerly with his eyes every line of her lovely profile he began:

"Monica, you are cruel; you have not let me see you once all this long winter. I have been down from town so often, and tried again and again to see you, but each time that I called you had just gone out. But Chance has been good to me to-day. I have caught you."

The girl made no answer. He went on:

"Last summer you gave me a faint hope that in time you would listen to me. What have you to say to me now; have you not thought of me all these long months?"

She turned round to him, her eyes full of tears.

"I was wrong to let you think you might hope, Laurence, for I can't do as you wish. It seems wrong for me to listen to you. Think, I belong to Allen; I was to have been his wife. He was always talking of cousin Laurence; you seemed cousin Laurence to me, too. Don't you see? I belong to Allen; I can't marry you."

"But Allen is not——"

"Hush; we don't know; he must be living."

"Monica," he said, with great gentleness of voice, "think, it is four years; he was to have returned in a year."

"I must be faithful to him."

"This is nonsense, Monica," he said, half-angrily. "If Allen is living," he went on, "why have we not heard from him all these years? Are you going to waste your life in this little village and give up all chance of happiness for a fanciful idea of being bound to him? And think of me; I have loved you so long. Come to me, I shall love you so much that you must love me in return. Come, I swear that you shall never regret it, Monica."

"I must not listen, Laurence. I wish that you did not care for me."

"I can't help caring for you. I think I have loved you since the first day I saw you, and now that you are free——"

Before he could stop her she had darted away. She went along swiftly until she knew that she was out of sight.

Her thoughts were in a whirl. Why should she not yield? She knew that her happiness would be secure with this strong, tender man. He thought she did not care. In the old days she had compared Allen with him, and always to the former's disadvantage. For after the first glamour of their engagement she had seen the shallowness and selfishness of Allen's nature.

And, these last years, how the tenderness of his nature had shone out! What care he had given to Allen's desolate mother! He had almost filled the place of her son.

When Allen had gone away for a year, she had promised to be ready to marry him upon his return. But the year had passed, and other months had grown into years, and he had not returned. They had had no news of him after that last letter, written seven months from his departure.

The only reasonable solution of the mystery was that he was dead. His mother believed it, but Monica did not. She had promised to wait for him; she dared not break that promise.

Dare did not again see Monica, although each time he visited his aunt during the Spring he called at the parsonage. But Monica always was out.

One day in June Monica was returning home from a walk. Her way was in the neighbourhood of Allen's mother's house. As it was still early in the afternoon, she decided to go and pay her a call. She had not gone to see her often of late, through fear of meeting Laurence.

She felt that she would run no risk of meeting him this afternoon, he having visited his aunt the previous week. On reaching the house she found the hall door open. She knocked lightly and without waiting for a response, walked into the little breakfast-room, where she knew Mrs. Dare was in the habit of sitting.

But at the threshold Monica paused, for there stood Laurence by the window with an open letter in his hand. His aunt sat near him, apparently in a state of great excitement.

As she saw Monica she cried out:

"He lives, Monica, he lives; my boy lives! Come in and hear the letter."

Monica looked from her to Dare in bewilderment. She had turned very white. Laurence went up to her and drew her to a chair. He, too, was pale.

"Is it true?" gasped Monica, at length.

"I received the letter this morning, and came down by the first train."

"Where is he—I don't understand."

"In America."

Monica looked at him confusedly.

"Why—why haven't I—but I have been out all the afternoon. I suppose that I shall find a letter at home."

Dare did not reply. His aunt was still crying. She now looked up at Laurence.

"Finish the letter, Laurence. Listen, Monica; our Allen is still living."

Dare had folded the letter and was putting it into his pocket.

"There is little more of importance, dear aunt."

"But Monica must hear it, Laurence. Monica, child, we'll be happy now. Read the letter to her, Laurence."

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"My dear aunt, you must try to calm yourself, or you will be ill."

Monica was puzzled by Dare's evident desire not to read the letter to her.

"I shall go home now," said Monica. "Perhaps there is a letter for me."

Laurence had left the room and stood at the entrance door.

"I am coming with you," he said, as Monica came out.

Dare regarded the girl stealthily as they walked along. He marvelled at the unimpassioned manner in which she had received the news that Allen was alive. She was still very white, and there was a strained look in her face. Not the expression of joy he would have expected to see.

"Monica," began Dare hesitatingly, "I—do not think that you will find a letter from Allen."

She stopped still and looked at him.

"What is it, Laurence? You are hiding something. What is the mystery? Why did you not wish to read the letter?"

"Monica, I believe you are a brave girl. Call up all your pride now."

She gazed at him with wondering eyes.

"Laurence, what is it?"

He looked round hastily. It was but a short distance to the rocks on the beach, and the place was deserted.

"Let us go down there. I cannot talk to you here."

She followed him submissively. Thoughts of their last interview at this place came to her mind. Allen was alive, and she, wretched girl, was not glad. She did not love him. It was Laurence that she loved, but she must be faithful to Allen. Laurence must never guess what a wicked girl she was.

Dare seated her in a sheltered position and stood looking at her, a world of compassion in his eyes.

"Monica, I would give my life to spare you this. Allen is a scoundrel."

He drew the letter from his pocket, opening it slowly; and Monica said, with a touch of imperiousness in her voice:

"Let me read it!"

He gave it to her, and she read. She passed hastily over the preliminary lines. But what was this?

"*I shall wait until later, Laurence, old boy, to give you the details of all these years. Briefly, the enterprise on which I came out here failed. I kept on trying others, hoping to achieve some measure of success before returning home, but one failure succeeded another. Finally I was taken ill with rheumatic fever.*

"*The woman at whose house I was staying nursed me through it, and her daughter, one of the sweetest girls in the State, helped her. Call me all the hard names you wish, Laurence, I'll not try to excuse myself, but I fell in love with her and we were married. I was a coward, I know, but she loved me to distraction, and we are very happy.*

"*Believe me, I have not been easy when I thought of my mother and Monica. But I met Melton last week out here. He told me that you all believed me dead, and that Monica was reported to be engaged to you, so she is consoled and will forgive me.*

"*That is why I am writing to disclose my whereabouts. I am fairly prosperous, and shall have mother come out here immediately. I know she will forgive me, and she will find the sweetest little daughter-in-law in the country. You will suit Monica far better than I should have done. You have the same high ideals of duty, and all that sort of thing. I confess to living on a lower plane.*"

Dare stood looking at her sadly, reviling Allen in his heart.

"My darling, if I could have spared you this," he said.

Presently Monica looked up at him and said tremulously:

"Laurence, I tried all along to be faithful to Allen, but——"

"But what, Monica?"

She stood up and looked into his eyes a fleeting glance but—it was enough for Dare.

Emily Windsor.

Your Editor Chats.

The Eleventh Love Problem.

I CONSIDER that the best solution to the Unsolved Love Problem, entitled "Brian Cresswell's Choice," was sent by Mr. Ernest McClatchie, 28 Edith Road, West Kensington, London, and I therefore award to him the guinea I offered.

The name of the winner of the twelfth and last problem, "The Test of Ruth Lawson," will be announced as soon as possible.

Our Whitsuntide Holiday Number.

NEXT week's issue will be a splendid Whitsun Holiday number. It will be full of interesting stories and clever illlustrations, and will be the very paper for you to take with you if you are making a train journey. One of the charms of *Short Stories* is that, the stories being complete, you can read it at any time you have half an hour to spare without the risk of losing the "connection" of the story, as you are liable to do when a story is long-winded and drawn-out.

The Signature Competition.

EXPERT examiners are now very busy checking the entries for the Signature Competition that closed a fortnight ago, and as soon as ever it is possible I shall announce the names of the fortunate winners.

A Proverb to Heed.

THE old Latin motto, "*Bis dat qui cito dat.*" ("He gives twice who gives quickly"), is one of the truest of all proverbs. I wish that you would demonstrate the force of it to the benefit of the Fresh Air Fund. Just send along one ninepence now, and afterwards follow it up by another. Ninepence is such a small amount that scarcely any of my readers would appreciably miss it. And yet this ninepence will work such wonders if properly spent. It will afford one poor child a whole day's outing in the beautiful country that he never—or seldom—has a chance to see. The organisers of the Fresh Air Fund watch over the welfare of each child for that one day, and see that he or she thoroughly enjoys himself or herself. The actual cost of conveyance to and from the country and the necessary food monopolise the whole of the ninepence—all other expenses are borne by the organisers themselves.

Will *you* not send in just a small donation—just what you think you can afford to give—for the sake of those children of the gutter who long for the warm sunshine and the open air? Do!

All monies received will be acknowledged in *Pearson's Weekly*, and they should be sent to the Hon. Secretary, Fresh Air Fund, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

Your Editor.

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"Mr. JAMES."

A Pretty Story with a Pleasant Ending.

It was a lovely day in July when Arthur Hayes came into possession of "The Poplars" through the death of an uncle whom he had never seen, and had hardly heard of even.

Up to the present he had been a struggling journalist, scarcely earning sufficient to keep body and soul together, and here he was, suddenly made master of one of the richest estates in the country.

Sir George Hayes had a daughter, a beautiful girl of nineteen, but, as the estates were strictly entailed on the male descendants of the family, he was unable to do anything further than settle an allowance on her of £100 a year, making her the ward of the future Baronet until she should attain the age of twenty-one.

Ida Hayes had never been brought up to expect that she would inherit anything at her father's death, and she had been given a thorough training (at her own express wish) in secretarial duties. Lady Hayes had been much against this course, but Ida had overcome her prejudices, and eventually had her own way.

"You know, mamma," she had said, "if anything happened to papa, we should have to do something, and no lady need be ashamed of earning her living in so pleasant a way!"

"Tut! tut, child! You will be married long before anything of that description happens, I hope!"

Whereupon Ida had wisely held her peace, and said nothing, but she had mentally vowed that, come what might, she would never marry anyone simply for a home or for money.

So it came to pass that, when she had reached the age of nineteen, Sir George had died, after a long illness, and his wife, who had nursed him herself devotedly through the entire eighteen months of his sickness, died three days afterwards, leaving Ida orphaned, and practically homeless!

Ida was, as before stated, a lovely girl. Tall, of a slender, perfect figure, and a queenly carriage, she had golden-brown hair, large, expressive violet eyes, a small, well-shaped nose and mouth with pearly teeth, and a "roseleaf" complexion; she was truly a picture any artist would delight in!

She was not, like many young ladies in her station of life, proud or haughty. No, Ida had a sympathetic and gentle heart, and, what is more, she was an earnest and God-fearing Christian, beloved of all for her kindness and gentle tact, especially for those in sickness or distress.

When Mr. Ramsey, the old family lawyer, had approached her with words of sympathy for her position and altered prospects, she had replied, with a rare, sweet smile:

"Not so, Mr. Ramsey, I am no worse off now than I was before. You know, I have never expected anything, and I have had a thorough business training. I am young and strong, and I am not ashamed to work!"

And the worthy man had left her, inwardly wondering at her quiet and unaltered demeanour, and saying to himself, "A queer lassie, but the best i' the world!" (for he was a Scotsman).

Arthur Hayes had heard of the Baronet's illness from a friend residing in the district, and he had also heard of Ida from this same friend, but, not being a "ladies' man," he had taken little notice of the enthusiastic description.

On receiving the news from Mr. Ramsey he at once made arrangements to visit "The Poplars." Alighting at the little station he perceived a small trap in the distance, coming along at a pretty good pace, and on inquiring from the station-master, learnt that the said trap belonged to "The Poplars." He knew that it could not be coming to meet him, for he had not advised anyone of his coming.

He sauntered along the high road leisurely, when suddenly the pony reared as a large white bird flew across the road, right under its eyes, and set off towards Hayes at a terrific rate. As the trap neared him, swaying violently, Hayes perceived that its only occupant was a young lady, who had evidently dropped the reins, and was clinging to the side of the vehicle for dear life. Pulling himself together, he waited, and as the pony got near enough he sprang at the bridle. The animal reared and plunged, and finally attempted to bolt again; but Hayes hung on for all he was worth. Then suddenly the wheel caught in a rut, and was thrown violently to one side. Quick as thought, Hayes released the horse's head, and turning caught the young lady in his arms, just in time to prevent her being thrown on the ground, letting the trap and pony fall clear into the ditch.

It was some moments before either could speak, when Hayes gasped out, as he released the terrified girl:

"Thank God!"

She tried to smile bravely as she held out a trembling hand, saying in an almost inaudible voice:

"How am I to thank you, sir? You have saved my life. I cannot be grateful enough!"

"I was only too pleased that I was at hand!" he replied courteously.

"But your arm!" she cried, noting for the first time that it hung limply by his side. "You have hurt it!"

"I am afraid I have!" he replied ruefully. "It is only a sprain, though, I think—nothing serious."

"I know a little about sprains," she said shyly. "Will you let me look at it?"

"Indeed it is nothing!" he replied hastily. "I shall do very well, I think, and——"

"No, no; you must let me see!" she said imperiously, and he had perforce to submit.

Passing her hand swiftly and gently along the wrist and arm, she found, to her dismay, that he had dislocated his elbow, and he could not suppress a slight groan, although her touch was almost as light as air.

"Oh, dear! I am afraid this is quite beyond me!" she exclaimed. "It is five miles to 'The Poplars,' and eight miles to the nearest doctor's. I am afraid we shall have to walk it, too, judging from poor Charlie's appearance and the state of the trap."

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At that moment a labourer's cart turned into view, and very soon reached the scene of disaster. With the help of the two men who occupied it the trap and pony were extricated from the ditch in a very dilapidated condition, the trap being minus of both wheels and Charlie lame. What was to be done now?

"It does not really matter about me," said Hayes, "I can walk; but what about you and the pony and trap?"

"We be goin' towards 'Th' Poplars,' Miss Ida," said one of the men. "Mebbe you'd not care fur a lift?"

"Indeed, Thomas, we shall be very pleased, if you will take us!" exclaimed Ida, smiling gratefully.

The end of it was that Ida and Hayes got into the cart, and the trap was lifted in also, or what remained of it, Charlie being tethered behind, looking very shamefaced, and in about half an hour this strange procession reached "The Poplars."

An elderly woman, in black satin, whom Hayes took to be the housekeeper, met them in the hall, anxiously inquiring:

"Whatever has happened, dearie? Has there been an accident?"

"Yes, Nurse; Charlie reared at something, and this gentleman has done me an everlasting favour, by saving my life, although he won't acknowledge the fact in the least!"

"Oh, dear, I never did trust Charlie, dear; but how grateful we are to you, sir!" she exclaimed, turning to Hayes.

"It is nothing," said Hayes; "there is a saying, you know, that 'beauty in distress is a pleasure to men,' and I can assure you that such is the case!"

"Come along in," laughed Ida, blushing. "Nurse, dear, Mr—— ?"

"James," supplied Hayes wickedly.

"Mr. James has dislocated his elbow in stopping Charlie, and I think Dr. Bland ought to see it directly."

Nurse waited a moment to send the two men whose aid had been so opportune round to the kitchen for "refreshments," and then followed the two indoors.

"No," Hayes was saying, "I have just arrived, and was going to spend the week here, at the inn. The sea air is so bracing here!"

"Oh, but I hope you will stay with us now, and we can show you heaps of things here. It will be a poor return for all you have done for us!"

"Yes, indeed," rejoined Nurse; "and your arm, you know, will require attention, which you would not get at the inn."

"I have sent Carter for Dr. Bland," said Ida, "so you will have to wait and see him now," as Hayes made a gesture of protest.

The upshot of it was that Hayes, after the elbow had been satisfactorily "set" by the doctor (who had known him since he was a boy at school, and who nearly let the cat out of the bag, but stopped the words on seeing a ferocious frown on the face of his patient), was installed at "The Poplars" until he had to return to London.

Very soon Ida left the room, to change her dress, which had got badly torn and dirtied in the skirmish; and Hayes, wishing to be alone with Dr. Bland for a few moments, said he felt very thirsty, and Nurse bustled off to see about tea.

"Now, what does all this mystery mean, sir?" exclaimed the doctor. "I suppose you're 'Sir Arthur' now?"

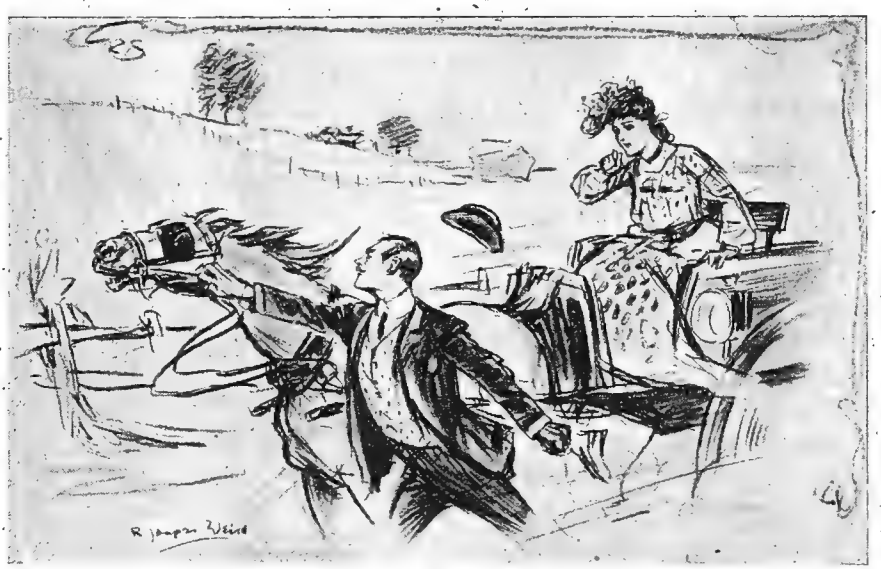
"No," replied Arthur, "I'm simply plain 'Mr. James, journalist, of Fleet Street, London!'"

"What do you mean?"—sharply.

"Just what I say, my friend! By-the-bye, I suppose that is the old Baronet's daughter, is it not?"

"Yes," replied Dr. Bland, who was an old friend of the family. "That is your cousin Ida, and a better or sweeter girl never breathed!"

"So I should think!" exclaimed Arthur warmly. "But she must not suspect that I am the new Baronet, and her guardian, Bland. I want to make her acquaintance incog. Understand?" And he looked at the doctor significantly.



Hayes sprang for the bridle and hung on for all he was worth.

"All right, my boy, I won't spoil sport!" laughed the doctor, with a twinkle in his kind, grey eyes. "Love at first sight, eh? Well, you'll be a lucky chap if you win her, 'Mr. James'!"

"Here, I say, shut up, Bland!" cried Arthur, flushing to the roots of his curly brown hair. "It's too bad of you, really, you know, and——"

At that moment Nurse re-entered the room, bearing the tea-tray, and followed by Ida, who was now clad in a gown of soft, clinging black material, with a spray of snow-white flowers in her belt.

Dr. Bland, having no pressing engagements just then, stayed to partake of a friendly cup, and afterwards departed, saying he was going towards the station, and would see that Hayes' portmanteau was sent on.

This, however, was rather a puzzling undertaking when he arrived at the station, for the label bore the name "Arthur James Hayes!" However, the worthy doctor was not to be beaten, and, after some little trouble, he succeeded in completely obliterating the last name, and triumphantly dispatched the porter with his burden, smiling to himself the while, for he had never thought that Arthur would have acted so, having almost set him down in his own mind as a confirmed bachelor, although the lad had only reached the age of twenty-nine!

* * * * * *

Three months had passed, and Arthur was still an inmate of "The Poplars." Nor did he seem inclined to quit that hospitable roof. He had written to his solicitor, telling

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him that he was unable to do anything definite for the present, but would communicate with him later. In the meantime, he hoped that the present occupant of "The Poplars" would continue there, at least for the present, until some arrangement could be come to with regard to his ward, and other pending matters.

This Ida was very glad of, for she had not yet secured an appointment as secretary, although she had made strenuous efforts to do so. Her youth and inexperience, too, stood much in her way.

She had been the almost constant companion of Arthur since he came to "The Poplars," finding him a most agreeable talker, for he had travelled a good deal in his capacity as journalist, and he was nothing loth to relate some of his adventures as war correspondent to his fair companion.

The days were now getting rather chilly, and the evenings drawing in, for the first week of November had already passed, It happened that, one evening, Ida was seated at the piano. singing softly to herself that lovely old ballad, "When Other Lips and Other Hearts," when Arthur entered the room silently, and stood behind her until she had finished the song, letting her hands linger over the keys at the concluding bars.

When she rose she was startled to find him standing there, and exclaimed laughingly:

"Whatever do you want to creep in so quietly for, Mr. James, like a thief in the night! Do you want to run off with something?"

"Yes," replied Arthur, with his soul in his eyes, "but I'm afraid it will be rather a difficult job!"

"You will never make a good burglar," laughed Ida, dropping her eyes and blushing vividly, "if that is the view you take of things, Sir Faintheart!"

That was quite sufficient for Hayes. In another moment he was by the side of the chair into which Ida had sank, exclaiming:

"Ida, can you give me the slightest hope, darling? You must know I love you, dearest. Dare I hope that you will consent to share my lot some day? Tell me you care for me just a little, dearest, and I will be content!"

Ida raised her eyes shyly to his face, and then dropped them again, while he pleaded:

"Ida, do not say me nay—not just yet, at least. Perhaps I have spoken too soon, or is it that you do not care to marry a struggling journalist? Oh! Ida, my darling, cannot you love me just a little bit?"

She looked up bravely now, murmuring in a sweet voice, which was scarcely audible:

"Not a little, dear, but a very great deal!"

"My darling!" exclaimed Arthur, "is it possible that you consent to become the wife of a poor man? Remember, dear, I have nothing beyond what I earn as journalist. It would mean, perhaps, waiting for years ere we could build a home."

"Yes," she replied, in the same tone, "I love you, Arthur, and I am young, you know, and can work too!" Then she looked up suddenly with: "But my guardian, dear. I do not know how he will take this. I have not even seen him, and you know I may not marry until I am twenty-one without his consent."

"Never mind the guardian, dear, we must overcome his objections somehow," said Arthur, feeling very guilty; "do not let any doubts sully our happinesss, dearest!"

Here he drew off a small signet ring from his little finger, and slipping it on her left hand, he said:

"That will serve until another is got, darling!" kissing her fondly the while.

The next day Arthur announced his intention of running up to London again, much to Ida's regret.

"You know, darling, my principals are getting impatient, and it would never do for me to get into their bad books now!" To which Ida was reluctantly compelled to agree.

Three days later, Arthur wrote apprising his solicitor (Mr. Ramsey) of his intention of going down to "The Poplars" in a day or two, if convenient, to which letter he received a reply that Miss Hayes would be very pleased to welcome her guardian on Thursday, and hoped that he would be well impressed with the place.

Arthur smiled somewhat at this reply, and took the morning train to Cranfield Glen the next day (Thursday), arriving at the familiar little station about two in the afternoon.

On ringing the bell, he was admitted by a new butler, much to his relief, for he did not want to be recognised yet. He sent his card up to Ida, who very soon came into the room.

"Arthur! Oh, I am so glad!" she exclaimed. "But," looking round, "where is my guardian? I was told he was here."

"And so he is!" replied Arthur.

"But I don't see him," said Ida.

"Darling, don't you understand? I am Sir Arthur Hayes, and——"

"But you said you were Mr. Arthur James, and a journalist?" she said wonderingly, but smiling mischievously the while.

"That is perfectly true, dear. My name is Arthur James Hayes, and up to the present I have been earning my living as a journalist. I thought of coming over here the day you upset the trap, but changed my mind as I thought I should like to have a look round first without being recognised. You know the rest, dear, and I—why, whatever are you laughing at, Ida?" as he looked round and saw that she was standing by the window, her shoulders shaking with suppressed laughter.

"Why, what a dear old simpleton you are!" she laughed. "You ought to have guarded your linen more carefully, sir, if you did not want to be discovered. Look," holding up a handkerchief, "I found this the other day, after you left!" pointing to the mark in the corner "A. J. Hayes."

"Then you knew all the time?" he questioned, colouring.

"Not all the time, dear; I only found this after you left us on Friday afternoon. Oh, base deceiver!"

But there was no trace of anger in her voice at the said deception, and Arthur sprang up, catching her in his arms, and kissing her repeatedly, exclaiming:

"You're not angry then, darling? I was afraid I should not win you in the *rôle* of Baronet and guardian, so I had to resort to the next best means of managing matters!"

"You know I always said you would never make a good burglar!" laughed Ida.

"You don't deserve her, my fine fellow!" was the comment of Dr. Bland, who was summoned the next day to attend one of the servants who had been taken suddenly ill.

"All the same!" retorted Arthur, "I've got her, and what is more, I mean to keep her!"

But Ida would have none of that, saying, as the worthy old doctor imprinted a kindly kiss on her cheek:

"I am not worthy of him, doctor, but I mean to try and make him a good wife, with God's help!"

Twelve months later they were married, and started off on a Continental tour for their honeymoon, the happiest pair that one could wish to see.

Una C. Brown.

A ROYAL PANTOMIME.

Admission—SIXPENCE.

It isn't every day that you have an opportunity of seeing a pantomime for the modest sum of sixpence. But just now you have the opportunity of seeing *Cinderella and the Magic Slipper*—not the old Cinderella that you were told about as children, but quite a new one with a new slipper—and getting a lot of amusement and enjoyment out of it, for just that amount of money.

Cinderella and the Magic Slipper is the pantomime that was performed early this year at Chatsworth when the Duke of Devonshire entertained Their Majesties the King and Queen with regal magnificence. The little play was specially written for the occasion, and specially performed by a caste of well-known Royal and Society personages. It was a brilliant success, and thoroughly delighted the distinguished company who witnessed its production.

Therefore, get your sixpence ready and buy the May **Pearson's Magazine**, where it is reproduced for the benefit of the general public. And don't waste time, but make sure of an "early door" by making the best of your way to the nearest bookstall.

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- A - Burglar's Romance.

Relating how Mr. Emley Changed his Name to Mr. Smith and Lived in Clover for a Short Time.

Mr. Emley was a burglar. He was, however, a select burglar, an artist in his profession.

On a very dark night one March he walked up the front steps of the finest house in Castletown. The house had been sold a few weeks before to a gentleman in France, and Mr. Emley's reasons for visiting the place before its owner returned from abroad were known only to himself.

He was a cool man, never taken unawares, prepared for any situation which might present itself, and if on that dark night he was surprised to see the door before him suddenly open, no one would have guessed it. Certainly the servant on the inside of the threshold did not. He started back in dismay, believing it to be his new and unknown master who stood confronting him.

"Good evening," said Mr. Emley, raising his hat.

"Wh-h-hy, we didn't expect you for several days yet, sir," stammered the servant.

"Indeed!"

"And nothing is ready, sir; but if you will come in, we can make hasty arrangements."

Mr. Emley stepped into the hall, and the servant turned on the electric lights. A sumptuously furnished room was revealed, a servant in correct uniform, and a tall, brown-eyed gentleman of about thirty-eight years of age.

He wore a tan overcoat and a high silk hat. The servant was greatly impressed with these evident proofs of gentility. He spoke reverently.

"The side room with the bay window is nearest ready, sir. If you would care to go in there——"

"It will do very nicely," said Mr. Emley. "I should have let you know I was coming, but really the idea never occurred to me."

The side room was eminently satisfactory. It was exactly the kind of a room that Mr. Emley had often, with pangs of envy, seen other men sleep in. To sleep in one himself had seemed an impossible dream, but it was fast assuming a reality, a common sureness, that charmed him.

"Would you like something to eat, sir?" suggested the servant.

"I am hungry, and ah—ah——"

"Jenkinson, sir."

"Thanks. If you have something to drink, Jenkinson! It is a trifle raw outdoors. And—by the way, has any letter come for me lately?"

This was an excellent stroke of diplomacy on Mr. Emley's part. He was anxious to know who he was. The address on the envelope would tell him.

"A letter came two or three days ago, sir, but we forwarded it immediately to Paris."

"I must have missed it. How was it addressed?"

"Just 'F. M. Smith, The Grange, Castletown,' sir. I think it was an advertisement."

"Probably. I'll have supper here."

"Yes, sir."

The servant departed, and Mr. Emley gazed about with a fast swelling air of pompousness.

"Dick, old boy," he said to himself, "it isn't exactly what you came for, but it'll do. It's your infernal luck again, old man, and if you're asleep I don't care, but if you wake up I'll never forgive you."

When supper was finished, and the servant was about to retire, Mr. Emley called to him.

"Jenkinson! Be sure and look everything up securely. I have been told that burglars are very daring in this part of the country."

"Indeed, they are, sir," replied Jenkinson. "There's no telling what they'll do next. But it'll be a very cold day when they get the better of me, sir."

"It is rather chilly to-night," observed Mr. Emley.

* * * * *

By noon the next day Mr. Emley had in a large degree overcome the strangeness of his situation. He no longer had an almost ungovernable impulse to gather to his bosom all the silver on the sideboard, and noiselessly flit through the nearest window.

But it was still a novelty to step out of the front door in full sight of the servants and enjoy the view from the porch without being driven to the extremity of drawing a revolver or taking to his heels. It was a delight to his artistic nature to sit in the drawing-room and cut the pages of the latest magazine with a gold-handled, ivory paper-knife, replacing the knife on the table when finished with.

I must admit he tried this latter experiment several times before successfully accomplishing it, and in spite of his earnest endeavours his pockets were soon filled with a collection of small valuables. However, his environment was having a good effect upon his moral nature.

"I would be an honest man were I in reality Mr. Smith," he told himself, running his hand caressingly over a jewelled sword hilt that hung in the hall.

But the sword hilt held strong attractions not consistent with moral reform, and Mr. Emley strolled out of doors and down the gravel path towards the wrought-iron entrance gates. Through the gates came a messenger boy with an orange envelope in his hand.

"Good afternoon, my little man," said Mr. Emley.

"Good afternoon, sir," said the boy.

"You have a telegram?" "For Who?"

"Mr. Jenkinson, sir."

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"All right, I'll take it. I have charge of everything here, and will know just where to find Mr. Jenkinson should he not be at the house."

Mr. Emley coolly appropriated the telegram.

"Now, I wonder," said he, "whom this is from?"

He turned the message round and round in the brilliant sunlight, but no answer to his question shone forth.

"If I were in reality Mr. Smith, I'd take this to Jenkinson, but, as I am not——"

Mr. Emley tore open the envelope. The message was from Paris, and read:

"*Bad accident. Return in a month.*—F. M. Smith."

"Hurrah! Mr. Emley, allow me the pleasure of bidding you a long adieu! Mr. Smith, make yourself perfectly at home for a month, and I think it's high time you became acquainted with your new neighbours."

Mr. Smith proved an exceedingly popular man. Castletown was rather a dull little place, and its *elite* society was rapidly boring itself to death. Therefore, the new owner of the Grange was welcomed, figuratively speaking, with wide open arms.

And this was not at all strange. Young, handsome, and possessed of great wealth, and a long, silky moustache, when moustaches were scarce, Mr. Smith was an unusually eligible man. Sweet girls smiled encouragingly upon him, and anxious mothers deluged him with invitations.

The older men said he was "a good fellow," and the younger men admired the way he spent his money—or, that is, ran up bills. Altogether his path was one of roses, and he went on his way rejoicing.

* * * * *

It was at a ball that he met the woman in the case. Two of the precious four weeks had flown by on swift wings, and festivities were at their height. Mr. Smith had flung himself into the new life with all the pent-up energy of his strong nature. It was his first taste of this kind of social pleasures, and there must have been a hidden strain of refinement in his unknown parentage, for he easily adapted himself to his new surroundings.

And it was no wonder that under the smile of Fortune he forgot he was wanted by the police of almost every large town in the country, and walked through the ballroom with head held proudly erect.

It was thus that she first saw him.

"Who is that?" she inquired of a friend.

"Where? Oh, that is Mr. Smith of The Grange."

"Of the Grange! Up here on the hill?"

"Yes. Haven't you met him yet?"

"No," she answered, looking curiously at him, "I have not."

She was introduced to him as Miss Lormer.

"She only got back from Paris a few weeks ago, too," said the friend who introduced them. "How strange you did not meet her over there, Mr. Smith."

"Well, ah! Paris is rather a large place, you know," said Mr. Smith.

"Were you there long?" inquired Miss Lormer, looking up with earnest eyes. She was a sweet, pretty, little creature with a delicate oval face filled with childish innocence and purity.

Mr. Smith felt uncomfortable. Fortunately, though, his conscience didn't trouble him much. His acquaintances used to say he didn't have any conscience, but then, of course, that was absurd.

"It all depends upon what you call long," he said, evasively replying to Miss Lormer's question.

He asked her to dance, and was charmed with her conversation and manner. They danced together several times, as was noticed and remarked upon by the eagle-eyed matrons. Miss Lormer's dancing was beyond criticism, and she had an artless way of accompanying her statements with an appealing upward glance that made Mr. Smith's brain whirl.

He lured her into the conservatory, but when he had found a divan small enough for two she seemed deeply interested in the mysterious arrangement of a tea rose she held in her hand. Mr. Smith adored her shy timidity, and planned to get possession of the rose. He was trained to patience.

"It is strange I have not met you before," he murmured, laying his arm on the back of the seat, and looking at the brown curls before him.

"I only came from London last night. Have you been here long?"

The earnest eyes were upliftcd, and Mr. Smith was glad he could tell the truth.

"No, only a fortnight."

"How dull it must seem to you after Paris, especially as you have no relatives here, nor anyone you know very well."

"I don't find it dull now," he said meaningly.

The grey eyes drooped, and the petals of the rose were cruelly mutilated. There was silence for a while.

"Are you going to make your home permanently at The Grange?" asked Miss Lormer, breaking the speaking stillness.

"Well, I can hardly tell yet," said Mr. Smith. "It all depends on circumstances."

"Yes?"

"Yes. But at present I haven't the slightest intention of leaving."

"You came rather unexpectedly, did you not?"

"Yes. It has never been my custom to herald my movements from the housetops."

"Well," said Miss Lormer, rising and breaking the flower to the ground. "I hope you weren't disappointed in your expectations."

"I did not imagine that anything could have so far exceeded them," replied Mr. Smith, picking up the rose, and pressing it to his lips.

They were constantly meeting after this, and although Mr. Smith was not in love, he was heading in the right direction.

* * * * *

The third week seemed hardly begun ere it was finished, and he was gazing with dismay upon the unavoidable ending of his adventure. Another telegram, announcing the exact date of the real Mr. Smith's return, threw him into a momentary whirlwind of passion and defiance.

"I will not give it up! I will not!"

But things finally re-adjusted themselves to their normal condition, and Mr. Smith was but a thin mask covering Dick Emley, smartest burglar that Scotland Yard had ever known.

"I have had my taste of high life, and it has been perfect," he soliloquised, "and the only thing to do now is to gain some lasting benefit from it; a sort of interest on my money, as it were."

Castletown was an old little town, and within its narrow limits treasured many priceless ancestral heirlooms. Family relics were its great distinction, and chief among these was silver. Every housewife recognised in society had her silverware, heavy with age and tradition.

It was strange no one had thought of a silverware exhibition before Mr. Smith proposed one, but nobody had, and the idea was hailed with delight.

"Having proposed the plan, the very least I can do," said Mr. Smith, "is to offer for the exhibition the use of my house and my service."

As he owned many rare pieces of silverware himself, and the public at large was curious to see the interior of his new home, he was gratefully thanked, and the offer accepted.

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Two evenings the exhibition lasted, and all Castletown turned out. The affair was one of great social magnificence. Under nodding palms the silverware reposed upon rich velvet or ruby, green, and gold. Subdued lights flung their rosy radiance upon gleaming statuary, and soft strains of music throbbed through a bower of ferns and lilies.

The host was irreproachable. With a dignified and reserved yet cordial welcome, he put all at their ease, establishing for himself an enviable reputation. Such a social success had never before been known in Castletown. The real Mr. Smith was having a precedent established for him that he might find a difficulty in living up to.

As was to be expected, Miss Lormer was the object of Mr. Smith's most marked attention. The town had recognised this, and the feminine portion of it was honestly endeavouring to accept the fact graciously.

"Now, he will always live here," said the matrons, wisely nodding their heads. "If he had not fallen in love with one of our girls, he would probably grow weary of so small a place, and return to Paris."

On the last evening of the exhibition, Mr. Smith escorted Miss Lormer to her home. In the little outside vestibule he took a hesitating farewell of her.

"Think the best you can of me always," he said. "Although no man can be all a good woman thinks he is, still I would have been all I seem to be, had I always had the opportunities I have now."

Miss Lormer looked troubled, and was about to speak impulsively, when a slight cough was heard, and, blushing slightly, she said, "Good-night."

When Mr. Smith returned home, he found the servants busily packing up the silverware under the stern supervision of the trustworthy Jenkinson. Mr. Smith had expressed himself as disinclined to assume longer than was absolutely necessary the responsibility of the borrowed heirlooms, and had made all arrangements for their return the next morning.

It was very early the next morning when Mr. Smith rose. Indeed, it was still night. It was the day of the real owner's arrival, and with his customary thoughtfulness for others, Mr. Emley had decided to leave. But there were several small matters to attend to first.

All over the house he went, upstairs and down, and not a single sound did he make. It was now that his great art showed itself. Bolts and bars opened like magic before the touch of his slender fingers, and after he had passed it was though an army of strange ants had been at work. The walls and mantels, the cabinets, tables, and floors were bare and unsightly.

He had taken the precaution of having the silverware packed in small boxes, but even so, he found difficulty in loading it on to the cart he had driven out upon the lawn. But at three o'clock the cart was filled. Climbing into the high seat, and taking the reins, he turned back towards the house and smiled.

"It is a very cold day, Jenkinson," he said.

Then he chuckled softly to the horse and began his journey. It was a very little journey. The horse had not taken ten steps before someone stepped out from the shadows and caught hold of the bridle rein. Mr. Emley sprang to his feet, only to find himself looking into the barrel of a revolver.

"I beg your pardon," said a soft voice, "but could I speak to you for a few moments?"

For the first time in his life Mr. Emley was stunned, helpless, at the mercy of his opponent. The voice was that of Miss Lormer.

"If you will get down from the cart," she said, "I will put this revolver away. I am a very good shot," and she laughed, "but the thing makes me nervous."

"Who would have thought that you were in the profession, too!" Mr. Emley muttered in dazed tones as he mechanically climbed down from the cart.

Miss Lormer laughed again, more heartily than before, and it was then he saw that she was not alone. A man stood at the horse's head. One of his legs was bandaged, and he leant heavily on a cane. He was a tall, good-looking young man, and he returned Mr. Emley's survey with great interest.

Noticing the exchange of glances, Miss Lormer turned to Mr. Emley, slightly embarrassed.

"Allow me to introduce to you, Mr. Smith, my *fiancé*."

Mr. Emley started and flushed. Quickly recovering himself, however, he bowed low to the stranger.

"Thank you," muttered the real Mr. Smith.

"Yes," said Miss Lormer, reflectively, leaning her hand on one side, and looking down at the revolver which she held in one hand, and patted with the other; "you see, I met him in Paris, and we became engaged. I wanted a home here, where I was born, so he bought The Grange, and I picked out the servants. That is why you weren't known as an impostor at once. Mr. Smith was coming here with me, but had an accident, so I extended my visit to London, where I was waiting for him. When I came here I was rather surprised to see you, you know"—she looked up with a twinkle in her eye—"but you were such a good actor I hated to interfere. Of course, I had to tell Frank, but he always lets me do as I please, and here we all are."

She smiled triumphantly, as though having successfully gathered together a picnic party, and Mr. Smith stood leaning against the horse, evidently much amused with the situation. It was hard to realise that the gentlemanly Mr. Emley was a common burglar, as, indeed, he was not.

"And now that we are here, what are we going to do?" asked Mr. Emley.

His voice had a strange, unnatural sound that made Miss Lormer wince. Perhaps her conscience was not entirely untroubled as to her treatment of him.

She held out her hand.

"I think," she said gently, "you had better go."

Mr. Emley bowed low over the little hand. He lifted his hat to Mr. Smith, and, turning, walked away from them into the darkness. When he was far enough away to render conversation inaudible, Miss Lormer called to him:

"Wait a minute!"

He stood in the darkness waiting, and she fearlessly went up to him.

"I don't like to think of you going away without anything," she said; "here, take this."

She pulled a tea rose from her hair, thrust it into his hand, and ran back to her lover.

"Dick," said Mr. Emley to himself, "you have been awakened."

R. L. Saunderson.

He: "Are you sure that I am the only man you ever really and truly loved?" She: "Perfectly sure. I went over the whole list only yesterday."

George: "Do you think that your father will consent to our marriage, darling?" Ethel: "Oh, yes. He has always humoured my silliest wishes."

"Do you pay for poetry?" asked the pretty girl. "Y—yes," replied the editor with some hesitation. "What do you pay?" "Compliments."

Young Man: "Are there any—er—tunnels on your railway?" Railway Official: "Yes, three of them. The line is a favourite one with newly-married couples. Two tickets, did you say?"

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A Very Suitable Servant.

Relating How an American Lady at Last Found a Butler that Suited Her, and the Consequences.

Mrs. Madison was an American lady, and she lived in New York.

It was Mrs. Madison's opinion that the servant question would be the death of her. The "question" with her meant, generally: How long will the newly-acquired domestic remain on the field of his or her usefulness—or uselessness?

Mrs. Madison was rich in this world's goods. She had an indulgent husband, charming children, a more than comfortable income, and enough beauty to make her very pleasant to look upon. But all these gifts of a kind Providence were as nothing weighed in the balance against the crushing fact that every one of the Madison butlers was worse than his predecessor. The poor lady had tried every nationality, as she said, except the Chinese; there she drew the line.

At the time when this veracious history opens, the latest venture in the pantry line had proved to be a complete failure, and was to depart on the morrow.

Mrs. Madison sat in her charming sitting-room, over a wood fire, with the hot-water kettle hissing genially among its companion tea-things, which had been brought in for the last time by the present incumbent.

Opposite to her was her sister, Sylvia Arden. She had just come in from walking, and her long sealskin garment was thrown open as she sat toasting her feet and drawing off her gloves.

She was one of the prettiest girls in New York—which means that she was very lovely indeed.

"Shall you have that dinner on the fifteenth, Maud?" asked the young lady. She rose as she spoke, and divested herself of her furs, and as she did so one saw what a lithe and shapely figure she had.

"It all depends on the butler," said her sister. "George will get somebody to-day—goodness knows what."

"Ah, there's George's key in the door," said Mrs. Madison. "Now we shall see what news he brings."

In a moment or two the master of the house entered.

He took the cup of tea which his wife had poured out. Then, seating himself, he said: "Well, I have got him."

"Whom?" asked his wife mischievously.

"John Parkins—an Englishman."

"Was there ever an Englishman who wasn't named John?" asked Sylvia.

"Good references, of course?" said Mrs. Madison, with grim sarcasm. "They always have."

"No," said her husband cheerfully; "none at all."

Mrs. Madison was quite quiet.

"You are tired of the silver, then?"

"Not at all; but he won't take the silver. If there is anything dishonest about John Parkins, then I am wofully mistaken."

"You generally are," said his wife drily.

"Thank you, madam. No; he may be a little green, but he is one of the finest-looking men I ever saw."

"Do you remember our British Adonis?" asked Sylvia. "And how he handed round the lobster sauce in a kitchen jug? And put himself into the dumb waiter instead of the empty dishes?"

"Am I likely to forget it?"

"Then why," said Mrs. Madison, with sudden asperity, "do you subject us to a similar experience? How can you bring a man without a reference into my house?"

"On the same principle," said Mr. Madison setting down his cup with perfect imperturbability, "that you once said you would advertise for an atheist, having tried every religion in the housemaid line and failed lamentably with all the sects represented. I am tired of the men who have lived with all the British aristocracy. Now, Parkins assured me that he hasn't lived with any of them. He has the face of an honest, steady man; and he tells me that he is willing to learn."

Mrs. Madison gave a mock groan.

"That means that I am willing to teach," said she.

"And are we to have the Bellingers on the fifteenth?" asked Sylvia.

"By all means," said her brother-in-law. And so the conversation ended.

The next day, it being the first of the month, promptly at the hour agreed upon, John Parkins presented himself to the lady of the house, with a modest, deferential bearing, which was quite delightful. He was a strapping fellow of about thirty, dressed in worn but well-cut garments. His features were rather handsome, and his smooth-shaven upper lip showed at times a glimpse of very good teeth.

"It is not our custom to engage anyone without a reference," said Mrs. Madison. "We are placing great confidence in you in taking you like this into our house."

"I am aware of that, ma'am," said Parkins. "I am very thankful for your kindness. I hope I shall suit you."

"I hope so," said Mrs. Madison, in a tone which hinted that the hope was a forlorn one. "Have you had much experience in waiting at table?" she continued.

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"Not much, ma'am," said Parkins.

"May I ask where you lived last?"

The man hesitated for a moment.

"On a ranch, ma'am," he said, with a slight air of being unwilling to pursue the subject further. Then he added, with more alacrity:

"I was servant to a gentleman out in Wyoming."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Madison.

She had rather intended to bully John Parkins, but somehow the manner of the man forbade it.

Having this unaccountable feeling that further investigations would be almost an impertinence, she proceeded to instruct the new butler as to what would henceforth be expected of him. He showed great alacrity—zeal not according to knowledge. But in spite of a few awkwardnesses on his part, he produced a favourable impression on his new mistress.

Dinner that day passed off remarkably well, considering that Parkins was rather nervous, as servants are apt to be in new places.

Miss Arden could not help admiring his personal appearance and gentlemanly manner, and Mr. Madison sat at the head of the table, smiling blandly, and full of elation at the success of his latest venture.

When dinner was over, Mrs. Madison entered the pantry to ascertain how the new functionary was behaving. She was surprised to see a row of wet plates standing all round the room, leaning their backs against the wall.

"Why, Parkins, whatever are you doing with those plates?" she cried.

The butler regarded her with a deprecatory air.

"I was letting them dry a bit, ma'am," he said. "Have I done wrong?"

"Certainly," said Mrs. Madison. "The towels in that drawer are for drying the china."

Parkins blushed so brightly that she really pitied him.

"Beg pardon, ma'am," he stammered, "but you see a man gets so awfully rough in the West, ma'am. We hadn't many towels on the ranch. Thank you, ma'am. I'll use them in future. I'm very anxious to learn."

The drawing-room was henceforth entertained with the pantry episodes, of which this was the beginning.

In the main, however, Parkins gave satisfaction. He was sober, diligent, almost chivalrous in his attention to the wants of the ladies. The defects in his education as a butler were soon remedied, for Mrs. Madison was an excellent housekeeper, and was willing to take untold trouble to instruct anyone who was teachable. The fresh, handsome face of Parkins, his respectful and manly bearing, and his charming English accent, which was evidently not that of a cockney, ingratiated him with his employers and even their acquaintance.

Occasionally a new book or paper was missing from the sitting-room, and more than once it was found in the pantry among the rouge-cloths and plate-powder. In one case the missing volume was one of Lecky's, and Miss Arden, who had searched in vain, asked Parkins if he had seen it. He confessed to having borrowed it; and when Sylvia looked at him with obvious surprise, he made some confused remark about "bettering his education."

"If he can appreciate that book," said Miss Arden afterwards to her sister, "his education doesn't need much bettering."

One evening, when John Parkins had been with the Madisons for a month or more, several newly-arrived English people dined at the house. From the moment when the party sat down at the table, Parkins began to behave strangely. He became absent-minded and inattentive. His strongest desire appeared to be to get out of the room as quickly as possible.

Mr. Madison was annoyed, and thought for a moment that his butler might be under the influence of liquor; but after he had watched him for a minute or two he was convinced that the man was perfectly sober, though evidently labouring under great mental perturbation.

But, as one cannot watch one's butler all the evening, Mr. Madison's attention was soon diverted, and the circumstance passed from his mind.

One day in the early spring a letter came for George Madison from the British Legation at Washington.

It requested information in regard to the whereabouts of Mr. Cecil Finch, an English gentleman who was supposed to be in the United States at that time. Mr. Madison replied with polite brevity that he had never had the pleasure of knowing anyone of that name. Then he thought the matter would rest. But by return of post came another letter, which intimated that the Legation could not take Mr. Madison's reply as final, for Cecil Finch had been seen going in and out of Mr. Madison's house in New York.

Mr. Madison was by this time rather curious, and not a little indignant. He was not accustomed to having his word doubted.

He therefore wrote back somewhat sharply to the effect that the only Englishman who came and went in his household in the manner described was his butler, John Parkins.

"Upon my word," he said that night at dinner to his wife and sister-in-law, "I am tired of Mr. Cecil Finch without having seen him. The dogged pertinacity of the English diplomatists does them credit."

Parkins, who was handing a dish of sweets at the moment, started so violently that the dish almost slipped from his fingers.

This did not escape Mr. Madison, but he said nothing.

Afterwards, however, he remarked to his wife:

"If I am not mistaken, Parkins knows something about Mr. Cecil Finch."

In a day or two a third letter bearing the Washington post-mark arrived for Mr. Madison. It said:

"*Strange as it may appear, we should be glad if you would interrogate the man whom you call John Parkins as to the whereabouts of Mr. Finch. Tell him that your reason for asking is that Cecil Finch has come into a title and a fortune by the unexpected death of his uncle.*"

Mr. Madison was now thoroughly excited. What if his butler were the new lord in masquerade? He laughed to himself as he pictured the faces of his wife and sister when they heard the news.

It so happened that this last letter from the Legation had been sent to Mr. Madison's house, and it was there that he read it. His wife was out with Sylvia.

His decision was quickly formed. He touched the bell. Parkins appeared, calm and correct as he was in his best moments when there was nothing to disconcert him.

"Parkins," said his master, "did you ever happen to hear of an English gentleman called Cecil Finch?"

"Yes, sir," said the butler. "I think I heard you mention his name, sir, at dinner, a night or two ago."

"Have you ever seen him?"

"Yes, sir, in Wyoming, sir."

"It would be a good thing for him, Parkins," said Mr. Madison carelessly, "if you could find him."

"How so, sir?" asked the young man, changing colour a little

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"He has just come into his uncle's titles and estates; and he can't be found."

"By Jove! Is Lord Grinsmead dead?" cried the butler, in a voice very different from his usual guarded one.

Before he had time to pull himself together and apologise, Mr. Madison pounced upon him.

"Look here, Mr. Finch!" he said, quite sternly, "you are no butler! Your name isn't Parkins! Why did you lie to me, Cecil Finch?"

"No, Mr. Madison," said the man, "I am not a butler and my name isn't Parkins, and lie is not a word to use among gentlemen!"

"But, hang it, Parkins—Finch—whatever you are, I can't realise quite yet that you're not what I thought you five minutes ago. And I think I have a right to know why you have imposed upon me in this way," said Mr. Madison, still irate.

"Of course you have," said Mr. Finch, late John Parkins. "The story is simply this. I was pretty well down on my luck after having tried ranching and failed, as many a cleverer man than I am has done before. I was too proud to go home. There was no one of whom I could borrow, and I hadn't a penny. I saw your advertisement in the paper, and applied for the situation. I hadn't an idea that you'd take me, but I was touched by your confidence, Mr. Madison, and I've done the very best I could for you. I remembered our old butler at home, and I tried to model myself on him.

"The other night you thought, no doubt, that I was drunk. I wasn't; but the man who sat next to Mrs. Madison was a fellow who knew me well at Oxford, ten years ago."

Both men had been standing while they talked. Madison read candour and integrity in the handsome face of the other.

"Sit down, Mr. Finch," he said, "and tell me the rest."

"I would rather stand, thank you," said Finch. "How do you know that I'm telling you the truth? Is my Oxford friend in town still?"

"I believe so," said Mr. Madison.

"Will you go to him with me and get me identified?" asked Finch. Then he added, smiling a little: "I believe I've got one pretty decent coat."

* * * * *

About six o'clock the ladies came home. The drawing-room was full of Spring twilight.

"Why are no lamps lighted?" asked Mrs. Madison. "Where's Parkins? I never knew him to be so careless."

She rang the bell sharply. It was answered by her maid.

"Where is Parkins?" Mrs. Madison demanded.

"Gone out, ma'am, with Mr. Madison," said the maid demurely.

"With Mr. Madison? How extraordinary!"

"He said he might not come back," said the maid, rather enjoying Mrs. Madison's surprise.

Sylvia then entered.

"The table isn't laid, and I can't find Parkins anywhere," she said.

When the lady's-maid withdrew, the sisters expressed themselves more freely.

"Always the way with my butlers! Is this frightful servant-hunt going to begin again?" moaned Mrs. Madison.

"And really he was a man one could have loved, if he hadn't been a butler," sighed Miss Arden.

Presently Mr. Madison returned alone. Without giving his wife time for indignant questions, he said:

"Parkins wanted to come back and serve dinner, but I wouldn't let him."

"And pray why not?" asked his wife. "What has he done?"

"He has gone and got himself a title, and I thought that a dinner handed round by my Lord Grinsmead would choke us all."

* * * * *

The next day Lord Grinsmead, formerly Cecil Finch, *alias* John Parkins, modestly requested a few moments' conversation with Mrs. Madison.

She was less at her ease than he.

"I wanted to come back last night, Mrs. Madison," he said, coming forward without extending his hand, "but your husband would not hear of it. I am sorry that your proverbial bad luck with butlers has not been changed by me. I sail to-morrow, and I fear that you must supply my place, which will be easily done."

"There you make a mistake," she answered, motioning him to a chair. "You were the very nicest servant I have ever had in the house."

And then they both laughed long and heartily.

"May I see Miss Arden before I go?" he asked presently, with a decided deepening of his colour.

Mrs. Madison said "Certainly," and in a few moments Sylvia entered. He rose and gave her his chair, and she could not but notice how the obsequious alacrity of the butler had given way to the well-bred manner of the English gentleman.

"I want to say before I go," he said almost brokenly, "that I thank you for the happiest and most innocent months of my life. I have had constant kindness from you both, and I hope that you will all come to England some day that I may do something for you in return. I should like to show you the old park. It will be full of primroses in a few weeks." And a mist came before the eyes of the strong man as his heart turned towards his home.

Just before he went away he said very softly to Sylvia (her sister being somewhat in advance of them as they walked towards the door):

"Do you think that you can ever forget that I was your sister's butler?"

I don't know what she answered, but I do know that an account of Lord Grinsmead's wedding appeared in the *Court Journal* about a year later, and that the bride was a very lovely American. Another fact, also, I can tell you, which the *Court Journal* knows nothing at all about—to this day Lady Grinsmead calls her lord nothing but "Parkins."

N. Rothsay.

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Showing How Chance, in the Person of a Shop Assistant, Settled a Grievous Question.

"*KENILWORTH HOUSE—Situated in one of the prettiest spots in the Lake District. Lake, stocked with fish, near by; excellent golf links; fruit and vegetables raised on our own farm.—For terms, address Thomas Kenilworth, Bushwick.*"

All three read the same advertisement on the same morning, in the same train, though none knew of the existence of the others. And all three were leaving on July 1st for their annual holidays.

Jack Dunning left the train first, and as he walked out of Cannon Street station he muttered: "Beautiful country! Good fishing! Just my style! I'll write for terms this morning!" And he did.

At Waterloo Roy Putnam stuffed the morning paper in his pocket, lit his pipe, and remarked meditatively: "Excellent golf links, and home-grown fruits and vegetables. Not a bad combination. I'll write to that man Kenilworth to-day." And he kept his word.

Helen Driscoll, continuing on to Charing Cross, furtively drew forth a hairpin, jabbed out the Kenilworth House advertisement, tossed aside her paper and rose, thinking: "Superb view! And I ought to do some sketching this summer. I am getting so rusty. I hope the terms are not too high. I'll write the first thing when I get to the office." So letter number three started on its journey to Bushwick.

On July 1st the three found themselves at the nearest station to Bushwick. Dunning carried his fishing tackle, Putnam his golf clubs, and Miss Driscoll a sketching outfit.

During the coach ride to Kenilworth House the acquaintance ripened rapidly. By the time they pulled up before it each man was asking why the dickens the other fellow had come, and Miss Driscoll, being wise in her day and generation, could foretell that there would be something more exciting on her hands during the next fortnight than making water-colour sketches.

The second day she made a sketch in colours of the lake, and Dunning lost interest in the speckled beauties—until the sketch was finished. The fourth day she painted a picturesque corner of the golf links, and Putnam might have charged up to profit and loss the sum he had paid his caddy for the morning's work.

The fifth day it rained, and Miss Driscoll very appropriately might have shut herself in her room to paint a pair of bleeding hearts. But, being a healthy, well-balanced young person, she merely laughed at what she termed "the antics of those two boys," and made herself popular with the unfortunate beings, huddled dismally in the sitting-room, whose barrenness no one noticed on clear days.

Dunning and Putnam retired, each vowing that if the other fellow had any sense he would see that his presence at Kenilworth House was not necessary to either general or individual happiness. But the next day being clear of sky and dry under foot, the three started out as usual, Dunning carrying her tin paint box, Putnam her portfolio.

"That's all very well," remarked one of the gossips from the vantage point of a wicker reclining chair. "That Driscoll girl will find she can't play with the hearts of two nice chaps like those much longer. One or the other will bring matters to a climax soon."

In just one respect the speaker erred. Both men brought about the climax, operating, so to speak, within ten minutes of each other.

It happened the night of the dance, and spoilt the evening for Helen. They were both such charming fellows. She had not thought seriously of marriage. She was happily situated in a business way in great, bustling London town. She was not sure whether she really wanted to marry, and absolutely certain that she did not dare select the man. Her dilemma was painful.

Like a defiant little pagan, she told them both that she did not know her heart, but would try to read the signs written therein before she left Kenilworth House. Whereupon she proceeded to turn the matter over to Fate, murmuring carelessly: "And may the best man win."

And Fate, in punishment of her foolhardiness and distinctly feminine frivolity, took a hand in the matter promptly. The very next afternoon Helen laid aside her sketch with a gesture of despair. Her carmine paint was exhausted. Her labour must cease until she could drive into Bushwick and purchase the precious pigment.

Within five minutes she found herself without either cavalier. Each had excused himself with a reckless disregard as to what the other fellow might do if left alone on Love's battlefield.

At half-past five Jack Dunning, dusty, footsore and red-eyed, strode into the stationery shop at Bushwick and paralysed the single assistant by demanding half a sovereign's worth of carmine paint.

"What kind?" inquired the assistant when he regained his breath.

"What kind!" echoed Jack dully.

"Why, yes; you didn't say whether you wanted oils or water colours."

Jack was in a quandary. He had been watching Helen's eyes rather than her painting.

"What do girls mostly use to paint with?" he asked, throwing himself on the mercy of the assistant.

That astute individual thought fast and hard. He had just sold the last tube of carmine oil paint to another young man, who had also appeared hurried, footsore and dusty.

"Is it a water scene, sir?" he asked cautiously.

"It is," answered Jack, greatly relieved. "She is painting the lake."

"Then," remarked the young assistant urbanely, "of course she'll use water colour paints, but we've only got five shillings' worth of carmine."

"Well, give me that. I can send to London for more to-morrow. And thanks very much for your good advice."

Both men were late for dinner. Both sent their precious packages to Helen's room by the page boy. Both put the momentous question for a second time later in the evening.

What Miss Driscoll said to Mr. Putnam is not recorded, but Dunning winked furtively but distinctly at the fair Lady Moon when Helen patted his arm lovingly and murmured:

"You don't know what you owe those cakes of carmine paint, dear. I really didn't know my own mind until you both sent me the paints. That opened my eyes to the fact that you were my affinity. You took a genuine interest in my work. Mr. Putnam is very lovely, but to think of a man's never noticing whether the girl he pretended he loved painted in oils or water colours. Now, you——"

Very gently Dunning drew her head down on his shoulder. And again he exchanged courtesies with Lady Moon, for if ever that goddess condescended to wink, it was a soulful response to his infectious greeting.

Walter A. Tice.

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Her Reply.

They are sitting out a dance, and she delights in waltzing. He: "A penny for your thoughts." She: "They are not worth it. I'm thinking of you."

He's Going to be Rich.

He: "Dora, dear, do you think you could consent to be a poor man's wife?" "No; if he had me and still thought himself poor, I wouldn't want to be his wife."

They Were Faithful Sisters.

She: "I—I think I like you, Mr. Trotter, but I cannot marry and leave my twin sister alone. Wait until she is engaged." He: "Yes—but—er—that's just what she said when I proposed to her."

Both Their Wishes Were Fulfilled.

She (after breaking the wish-bone): "What did you wish?" He: "I wished that you would let me kiss you. What did you wish?" She: "I wished that what you wished should come true."

Too Candid.

Rich Fiancee: "Oh, this bouquet is too costly! You must take it back to the lieutenant." Valet: "Oh, that's all right, miss. Since my master is engaged to you he has been able to get things on credit."

Anxious to Know.

He: "I had a queer dream about you last night, Miss Louisa. I was about to give you a kiss when suddenly we were separated by a river that gradually grew as big as the Thames." She: "And was there no bridge and no boat?"

A Lesson in Punctuation.

Professor in English (to young man): "How would you punctuate the following: 'The beautiful girl, for such was she, was passing down the street'?" Student: "I think, Professor, I would make a dash after the beautiful girl."

Wealth Works Wonders.

Friend: "So yours was a case of love at first sight?" Mrs. Lovejoy: "Yes, indeed. I fell desperately in love with my dear husband the moment I set eyes upon him. I remember it all as distinctly as if it were yesterday. I was walking with papa on the promenade at Brighton, when suddenly papa stopped, and, pointing him out, said: 'There, my dear, is a man worth £120,000.'"

Unaccustomed Travelling.

Fwed: "Why, Cholly, dear boy, whatever is the mattah? You look awfully wowwied." Cholly: "Don't pity me, Fwed; I feel fwightfully upset." "But, Cholly, you weally must tell a fellah." "Well, Fwed, as you're a weal bwick, I'll tell yah. Fact is, I tumbled into the wong twain this mawning, and——" "Good gwacious, however was that?" "Why, I fell into a twain of thought, don't-cher-know?" "Bwute!"

Question for Question.

She: "Why does a woman take a man's name when she gets married?" He: "Why does she take everything else he has?"

An Interview in any Case.

"Emily, if William to-day asks you to marry him, you must tell him to speak to me." "Yes, mamma; but if he does not?" "Then tell him I want to speak to him."

Authoritative.

Big Sister: "Dick, I think it is time little folks were in bed." Little Dick (on Mr. Nicefellow's knee): "Oh, it's all right; mamma said I was to keep this seat until she came downstairs."

A Stern Truth.

Returned Traveller: "Is Mr. Goodheart still paying attentions to your daughter?" "He isn't paying her any attention at all." "Indeed? Did he jilt her?" "No, he married her."

He is Looked Upon with Favour.

Mrs. Matchmaker: "Mr. Wise, I take it from your interest in my daughter Pearl that you're a gem connoisseur." Mr. Wise: "It's due, madam, to my great admiration for mother of Pearl."

The Exception That Proves the Rule.

Albert: "All the world loves a lover, you know." Mildred: "You wouldn't say that if you had heard papa's remarks when he found, yesterday morning, that you had taken his hat by mistake."

He Was Negligent.

"You are not angry with me because I threw a kiss to you, are you?" he asked. "Yes, I am," she replied. "Why?" he inquired. "Because there was no impenetrable barrier between us that made it necessary."

How, Indeed?

She: "A doctor in Berlin, after a great deal of study, has discovered that married men live longer than bachelors." He (imploringly): "Save my life!" She (joyously): "Oh, Clarence, how did you guess that I loved you?"

Then and Now.

Wife (drearily): "Ah, me! the days of chivalry are past." Husband: "What's the matter now?" Wife: "Sir Walter Raleigh laid his cloak on the ground for Queen Elizabeth to walk over, but you get cross simply because poor, dear mother sat down on your hat."

Rather Mixed.

"George," she screamed, "my neck!" "What's the matter?" "There's a pillacatter——" "A what?" "A taperkiller——" "What in the world do you mean?" "Oh, dear!" she moaned, as she clutched him frantically. "A kitterpaller! You know, George! A patterkiller!" "Oh!" said George, with evident relief, and he proceeded to brush the caterpillar away.

The Circumstances that Altered Cases.

"I am sensible of the honour you do me, Mr. Spoonamore, in the proposal of marriage you have just made," said the young woman, with a slight curl of the lip; "but circumstances over which I have no control will compel me to decline the honour." "What are those circumstances, Miss Grimshaw?" fiercely demanded the young man. "Your circumstances, Mr. Spoonamore!"

His First Love.

"Dearest," cooed the sweet girl, "you have told me so often that I am your first love! But should Fate ever part us, promise me you'll never show my letters to your next." "How can you speak so, darling?" broke in the young man. "You know I'd never show them. Why, have I ever shown you the letters written me by——" Here the youth suddenly paused. And the chilling silence could be heard reigning on the roof outside.

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A Story of Love and Crime.

By ARNOLD BENNETT.

NINETEENTH CHAPTER.

Royalty at the Grand Babylon.

THE Royal apartments at the Grand Babylon are famous in the world of hotels, and indeed elsewhere, as being, in their own way, unsurpassed. Some of the palaces of Germany, and in particular those of the mad Ludwig of Bavaria, may possess rooms and saloons which outshine them in gorgeous luxury and the mere wild, fairy-like extravagance of wealth; but there is nothing, anywhere, even on Fifth Avenue, New York, which can fairly be called more complete, more perfect, more enticing, or more comfortable.

The suite consists of six chambers—the ante-room, the saloon or audience chamber, the dining-room, the yellow drawing-room (where Royalty receives its friends), the library, and the State bedroom—to the last of which we have already been introduced. The most important and most impressive of these six is, of course, the audience chamber, an apartment fifty feet long by forty feet broad, with a superb outlook over the Thames, the Shot Tower, and the higher signals of the South-Western Railway. The decoration of this room is mainly in the German taste, since four out of every six of its Royal occupants are of Teutonic blood; but its chief glory is its French ceiling, a masterpiece by Fragonard, taken bodily from a certain famous palace on the Loire. The walls are of panelled oak, with an eight-foot dado of Arras cloth imitated from unique Continental examples. The carpet, woven in one piece, is an antique specimen of the finest Turkish work, and it was obtained from an impecunious Roumanian Prince.

The silver candelabra now fitted with electric light, came from the Rhine, and each has a separate history. The Royal chair—it is not etiquette to call it a throne, though it amounts to a throne—was looted by Napoleon from an Austrian city, and bought by Félix Babylon at the sale of a French collector. At each corner of the room stands a gigantic grotesque vase of German faïence of the sixteenth century. These were presented to Félix Babylon by William the First of Germany, upon the conclusion of his first incognito visit to London in connection with the French trouble in 1875. There is only one picture in the audience chamber. It is a portrait of the luckless but noble Dom Pedro, Emperor of the Brazils.

In one of the window recesses of this magnificent apartment, on a certain afternoon in late July, stood Prince Aribert of Posen. He was faultlessly dressed in the conventional frock-coat of British civilisation.

He seemed to be fairly amused, and also to expect someone, for at frequent intervals he looked rapidly over his shoulder in the direction of the door behind the Royal chair. At last a little, wizened, stooping old man, with a distinctly German cast of countenance, appeared through the door, and laid some papers on a small table by the side of the chair.

"Ah, Hans, my old friend!" said Aribert, approaching the old man. "I must have a little talk with you about one or two matters. How do you find his Royal Highness?"

The old man saluted in military fashion. "Not very well, your Highness," he answered. "I've been valet to your Highness' nephew since his majority, and I was valet to his Royal father before him, but I never saw——" He stopped, and threw up his wrinkled hands deprecatingly.

"You never saw what?" Aribert smiled affectionately on the old fellow. You could perceive that these two, so sharply differentiated in rank, had been intimate in the past, and would be intimate again.

"Do you know, my Prince," said the old man, "that we are to receive the financier, Sampson Levi—is that his name?—in the audience chamber? Surely, if I may humbly suggest, the library would have been good enough for a financier?"

"One would have thought so," agreed Prince Aribert, "but perhaps your master has a special reason. Tell me," he went on, changing the subject quickly, "how came it that you left the Prince, my nephew, at Ostend, and returned to Posen?"

"His orders, Prince," and old Hans, who had had a wide experience of Royal whims and knew half the secrets of the Courts of Europe, gave Aribert a look which might have meant anything. "He sent me back on an—an errand, your Highness."

"And you were to rejoin him here?"

"Just so, Highness. And I did rejoin him here, although, to tell the truth, I had begun to fear that I might never see my master again."

"The Prince has been very ill in Ostend, Hans."

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"So I have gathered," Hans responded drily, slowly rubbing his hands together. "And his Highness is not yet perfectly recovered."

"Not yet. We despaired of his life, Hans, at one time, but, thanks to an excellent constitution, he came safely through the ordeal."

"We must take care of him, your Highness."

"Yes, indeed," said Aribert solemnly; "his life is very precious to Posen."

At that moment Eugen, Hereditary Prince of Posen, entered the audience chamber. He was pale and languid, and his uniform seemed to be a trouble to him. His hair had been slightly ruffled, and there was a look of uneasiness, almost of alarmed unrest, in his fine dark eyes. He was like a man who is afraid to look behind him lest he should see something there which ought not to be there. But at the same time, here beyond doubt was Royalty. Nothing could have been more striking than the contrast between Eugen, a sick man in the shabby house at Ostend, and this Prince Eugen in the Royal apartments of the Grand Babylon Hotel, surrounded by the luxury and pomp which modern civilisation can offer to those born in high places. All the desperate episode of Ostend was now hidden, passed over. It was supposed never to have occurred. It existed only like a secret shame in the hearts of those who had witnessed it. Prince Eugen had recovered; at any rate, he was convalescent, and he had been removed to London, where he took up again the dropped thread of his princely life. The lady with the red hat, the incorruptible and savage Miss Spencer, the unscrupulous and brilliant Jules, the dark, damp cellar, the horrible little bedroom—these things were over. Thanks to Prince Aribert and the Racksoles, he had emerged from them in safety. He was able to resume his public and official career. The Emperor had been informed of his safe arrival in London, after an unavoidable delay in Ostend; his name once more figured in the Court chronicle of the newspapers. In short, everything was smothered over. Only—only Jules, Rocco, and Miss Spencer were still at large; the body of Reginald Dimmock lay buried in the domestic mausoleum of the palace at Posen; and Prince Eugen had still to interview Mr. Sampson Levi.

That various matters lay heavy on the mind of Prince Eugen was beyond question. He seemed to have withdrawn within himself. Despite the extraordinary experiences through which he had recently passed, events which called aloud for explanations and confidence between the nephew and the uncle, he would say scarcely a word to Prince Aribert. Any allusion, however direct, to the days at Ostend was ignored by him with more or less ingenuity, and Prince Aribert was really no nearer a full solution of the mystery of Jules' plot than he had been on the night when he and Racksole visited the gaming tables at Ostend. Eugen was well aware that he had been kidnapped through the agency of the woman in the red hat, but, doubtless ashamed at having been her dupe, he would not proceed in any way with the clearing-up of the matter.

"You will receive in this room, Eugen?" Aribert questioned him.

"Yes," was the answer, given pettishly. "Why not? Even if I have no proper retinue here, surely that is no reason why I should not hold audience in a proper manner? Hans, you can go." The old valet promptly disappeared. "Aribert," the Hereditary Prince continued, when they were alone in the chamber, "you think I am mad."

"My dear Eugen," said Prince Aribert, startled in spite of himself. "Don't be absurd."

"I say you think I am mad. You think that that attack of brain fever has left its permanent mark on me. Well, perhaps I am mad. Who can tell? God knows that I have been through enough lately to drive me mad!"

Aribert made no reply. As a matter of strict fact, the thought had crossed his mind that Eugen's brain had not yet recovered its normal tone and activity. This speech of his nephew's, however, had the effect of immediately restoring his belief in the latter's entire sanity. He felt convinced that if only he could regain his nephew's confidence, the old brotherly confidence which had existed between them since the years when they played together as boys, all might yet be well. But at present there appeared to be no sign that Eugen meant to give his confidence to anyone. The young Prince had come up out of the valley of the shadow of death, but some of the valley's shadow had clung to him, and it seemed he was unable to dissipate it.

"By-the-way," said Eugen suddenly, "I must reward these Racksoles, I suppose. I am indeed grateful to them. If I gave the girl a bracelet, and the father a thousand guineas—how would that meet the case?"

"My dear Eugen!" exclaimed Aribert, aghast. "A thousand guineas! Do you know that Theodore Racksole could buy up all Posen from end to end without making himself a pauper. A thousand guineas! You might as well offer him sixpence."

"Then what must I offer?"

"Nothing, except your thanks. Anything else would be an insult. These are no ordinary hotel people."

"Can't I give the little girl a bracelet?" Prince Eugen gave a sinister laugh.

Aribert looked at him steadily. "No," he said.

"Why did you kiss her—that night?" asked Prince Eugen carelessly.

"Kiss whom?" said Aribert, blushing and angry, despite his most determined efforts to keep calm and unconcerned.

"The Racksole girl."

"When do you mean?"

"I mean," said Prince Eugen, "that night in Ostend when I was ill. You thought I was in a delirium. Perhaps I was. But somehow I remember that with extraordinary distinctness. I remember raising my head for a fraction of an instant, and just in that fraction of an instant you kissed her. Oh, Uncle Aribert!"

"Listen, Eugen, for God's sake. I love Nella Racksole. I shall marry her."

"You!" There was a long pause, and then Eugen laughed. "Ah!" he said. "They all talk like that to start with. I have talked like that myself, dear uncle; it sounds nice, and it means nothing."

"In this case it means everything, Eugen," said Aribert quietly.

Some accent of determination in the latter's tone made Eugen rather more serious.

"You can't marry her," he said. "The Emperor won't permit a morganatic marriage."

"The Emperor has nothing to do with the affair. I shall renounce my rights. I shall become a plain citizen."

"In which case you will have no fortune to speak of."

"But my wife will have a fortune. Knowing the sacrifices which I shall have made in order to marry her, she will not hesitate to place that fortune in my hands for our mutual use," said Aribert stiffly.

"You will be decidedly rich," mused Eugen, as his ideas dwelt on Theodore Racksole's reputed wealth. "But have you thought of this," he asked, and his mild eyes glowed again in a sort of madness. "Have you thought that I am unmarried, and might die at any moment, and then the throne will descend to you—to you, Aribert?"

"The throne will never descend to me, Eugen," said Aribert softly, "for you will live. You are thoroughly convalescent. You have nothing to fear."

"It is the next seven days that I fear," said Eugen.

"The next seven days! Why?"

"I do not know. But I fear them. If I can survive them——"

"Mr. Sampson Levi, sire," Hans announced in a loud tone.

Prince Eugen started. "I will see him," he said, with a gesture to Hans as if to indicate that Mr. Sampson Levi might enter at once.

"I beg one moment first," said Aribert, laying a hand gently on his nephew's arm, and giving old Hans a glance

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which had the effect of precipitating that admirably trained servant through the doorway.

TWENTIETH CHAPTER.

Mr. Samuel Levi Bids Prince Eugen Good-Morning.

"WHAT is it?" asked Prince Eugen crossly. "Why this sudden seriousness? Don't forget that I have an appointment with Mr. Sampson Levi, and must not keep him waiting. Someone said that punctuality is the politeness of princes."

"Eugen," said Aribert, "I wish you to be as serious as I am. Why cannot we have faith in each other? I want to help you. I have helped you. You are my titular Sovereign; but on the other hand I have the honour to be your uncle; I have the honour to be the same age as you, and to have been your companion from youth up. Give me your confidence. I thought you had given it me years ago, but I have lately discovered that you had your secrets, even then. And now, since your illness, you are still more secretive."

"What do you mean, Aribert?" said Eugen, in a tone which might have been either inimical or friendly. "What do you want to say?"

"Well, in the first place, I want to say that you will not succeed with the estimable Mr. Sampson Levi."

"Shall I not?" said Eugen lightly. "How do you know what my business is with him?"

"Suffice it to say that I do know. You will never get that million pounds out of him."

Prince Eugen gasped, and then swallowed his excitement. "Who has been talking? What million?" His eyes wandered uneasily round the room. "Ah!" he said, pretending to laugh. "I see how it is. I have been chattering in my delirium. You mustn't take any notice of that, Aribert. When one has a fever one's ideas become grotesque and fanciful."

"You never talked in your delirium," Aribert replied; "at least not about yourself. I knew about this projected loan before I saw you in Ostend."

"Who told you?" demanded Eugen fiercely.

"Then you admit that you are trying to raise a loan?"

"I admit nothing. Who told you?"

"Theodore Racksole, the millionaire. These rich men have no secrets from each other. They form a coterie, closer than any coterie of ours, Eugen, and far more powerful. They talk, and in talking they rule the world, these millionaires. They are the real monarchs."

"Confound them!" said Eugen.

"Yes, perhaps so. But let me return to your case. Imagine my shame, my disgust, when I found that Racksole could tell me more about your affairs than I knew myself. Happily, he is a good fellow; one can trust him; otherwise I should have been tempted to do something desperate when I discovered that all your private history was in his hands. Eugen, let us come to the point; why do you want that million? Is it actually true that you are so deeply in debt? I have no desire to improve the occasion. I merely ask."

"Do you think I'm mad, Aribert?" said Prince Eugen.

"And, what if I do owe a million?" said Prince Eugen with assumed valour.

"Oh, nothing, my dear Eugen, nothing. Only it is rather a large sum to have scattered in ten years, is it not? How did you manage it?"

"Don't ask me, Aribert. I've been a fool. But I swear to you that the woman whom you call 'the lady in the red hat' is the last of my follies. I am about to take a wife, and become a respectable Prince."

"Then the engagement with Princess Anna is an accomplished fact?"

"Practically so. As soon as I have settled with Levi, all will be smooth. Aribert, I wouldn't lose Anna for the Imperial throne. She is a good and pure woman, and I love her as a man might love an angel."

"And yet you would deceive her as to your debts, Eugen? Is that a very honourable thing to do?"

"Not her, but her absurd parents, and perhaps the Emperor. They have heard rumours, and I must set those rumours at rest by presenting to them a clean sheet."

"I am glad you have been frank with me, Eugen," said Prince Aribert, "but I will be plain with you. You will never marry the Princess Anna."

"And why?" said Eugen, supercilious again.

"Because her parents will not permit it. Because you would not be able to present a clean sheet to them. Because this Sampson Levi will never lend you a million."

"Explain yourself."

"I propose to do so. You were kidnapped—it is a horrid word, but we must use it—in Ostend."

"True."

"Do you know why."

"I suppose because that vile old red-hatted woman and her

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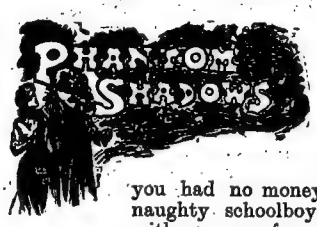

accomplices wanted to get some money out of me. Fortunately, thanks to you, they didn't."

"Not at all," said Aribert. "They wanted no money from you. They knew well enough that you had no money. They knew you were the naughty schoolboy among European Princes, with no sense of responsibility or of duty towards your kingdom. Shall I tell you why they kidnapped you?"

"When you have done abusing me, my dear uncle."

"They kidnapped you merely to keep you out of England for a few days, merely to compel you to fail in your appointment with Sampson Levi. And it appears to me that they succeeded. Assuming that you don't obtain the money from Levi, is there another financier in all Europe from whom you can get it—on such strange security as you have to offer?"

"Possibly there is not," said Prince Eugen calmly. "But, you see, I shall get it from Sampson Levi. Levi promised it, and I know from other sources that he is a man of his word. He said that the money, subject to certain formalities, would be available till——"

"Till?"

"Till the end of June."

"And it is now the end of July."

"Well, what is a month? He is only too glad to lend the money. He will get excellent interest. How on earth have you got into your sage old head this notion of a plot against me? The idea is ridiculous. A plot against me? What for?"

"Have you ever thought of Bosnia?" asked Aribert coldly.

"What of Bosnia?"

"I need not tell you that the King of Bosnia is naturally under obligations to Austria, to whom he owes his crown. Austria is anxious for him to make a good, influential marriage."

"Well, let him."

"He is going to. He is going to marry the Princess Anna."

"Not while I live. He made overtures there a year ago, and was rebuffed."

"Yes; but he will make overtures again, and this time he will not be rebuffed. Oh, Eugen! can't you see that this plot against you is being engineered by some persons who know all about your affairs, and whose desire is to prevent your marriage with Princess Anna? Only one man in Europe can have any motive for wishing to prevent your marriage with Princess Anna, and that is the man who means to marry her himself."

Eugen went very pale.

"Then, Aribert, do you mean to convey to me that my detention in Ostend was contrived by the agents of the King of Bosnia?"

"I do."

"With a view to stopping my negotiations with Sampson Levi, and so putting an end to the possibility of my marriage with Anna?"

Aribert nodded.

"You are a good friend to me, Aribert. You mean well. But you are mistaken. You have been worrying about nothing."

"Have you forgotten about Reginald Dimmock?"

"I remember you said that he had died."

"I said nothing of the sort. I said that he had been assassinated. That was part of it, my poor Eugen."

"Pooh!" said Eugen. "I don't believe he was assassinated. And as for Sampson Levi, I will bet you a thousand marks that he and I come to terms this morning, and that the million is in my hands before I leave London."

Aribert shook his head.

"You seem to be pretty sure of Mr. Levi's character. Have you had much to do with him before?"

"Well"—Eugen hesitated a second—"a little. What young man in my position hasn't had something to do with Mr. Sampson Levi at one time or another?"

"I haven't," said Aribert.

"You! You are a fossil." He rang a silver bell. "Hans, I will receive Mr. Sampson Levi."

Whereupon Aribert discreetly departed, and Prince Eugen sat down in the great velvet chair, and began to look at the papers which Hans had previously placed upon the table."

"Good morning, your Royal Highness," said Sampson Levi, bowing as he entered. "I trust your Royal Highness is well."

"Moderately, thanks," returned the Prince.

In spite of the fact that he had had as much to do with people of Royal blood as any plain man in Europe, Sampson Levi had never yet learnt how to be at ease with these exalted individuals during the first few minutes of an interview. Afterwards he resumed command of himself and his faculties, but at the beginning he was invariably flustered, scarlet of face, and inclined to perspiration.

"We will proceed to business at once," said Prince Eugen. "Will you take a seat, Mr. Sampson Levi?"

"I thank your Royal Highness."

"Now as to that loan which we had already practically arranged—a million, I think it was," said the Prince airily.

"A million," Levi acquiesced, toying with his enormous watch chain.

"Everything is now in order. Here are the papers, and I should like to finish the matter up at once."

"Exactly, your Highness, but——"

"But what? You months ago expressed the warmest satisfaction at the security, though I am quite prepared to admit that the security is of rather an unusual nature. You also agreed to the rate of interest. It is not every one, Mr. Levi, who can lend out a million at five and a half per cent. And in ten years the whole amount will be paid back. I—er—I believe I informed you that the fortune of Princess Anna, who is about to accept my hand, will ultimately amount to something like fifty million of marks, which is over two million pounds in your English money." Prince Eugen stopped. He had no fancy for talking in this confidential manner to financiers, but he felt that circumstances demanded it.

"You see, it's like this, your Royal Highness," began Mr. Sampson Levi, in his homely English idiom. "It's like this. I said I could keep that bit of money available till the end of June, and you were to give me an interview here before that date. Not having heard from your Highness, and not knowing your Highness' address, though my German agents made every inquiry, I concluded that you had made other arrangements, money being so cheap this last few months."

"I was unfortunately detained at Ostend," said Prince Eugen, with as much haughtiness as he could assume, "by—by important business. I have made no other arrangements, and I shall have need of the million. If you will be so good as to pay it to my London bankers——"

"I'm very sorry," said Mr. Sampson Levi, with a tremendous and dazzling air of politeness, which surprised even himself, "but my syndicate has now lent the money elsewhere. It's in South America—I don't mind telling your Highness that we've lent it to the Chilian Government."

"Hang the Chilian Government, Mr. Levi," exclaimed the Prince, and he went white. "I must have that million. It was an arrangement."

"It was an arrangement, I admit," said Mr. Sampson Levi; "but your Highness broke the arrangement."

There was a long silence.

"Do you mean to say," began the Prince with tense calmness, "that you are not in a position to let me have that million?"

"I could let your Highness have a million in a couple of years' time."

The Prince made a gesture of annoyance.

"Mr. Levi," he said, "if you do not place the money in my hands to-morrow you will ruin one of the oldest of reigning families, and, incidentally, you will alter the map of Europe. You are not keeping faith, and I had relied on you."

"Pardon me, your Highness," said little Levi, rising in

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resentment, "it is not I who have not kept faith. I beg to repeat that the money is no longer at my disposal, and to bid your Highness good-morning."

And Mr. Sampson Levi left the audience-chamber with an awkward, aggrieved bow.

It was a scene characteristic of the end of the nineteenth century—an overfed, commonplace, pursy little man who had been born in a Brixton semi-detached villa, and whose highest idea of pleasure was a Sunday up the river in an expensive electric launch, confronting and utterly routing, in a hotel belonging to an American millionaire, the representative of a race of men who had fingered every page of European history for centuries, and who still, in their native castles, were sursounded with every outward circumstance of pomp and power.

"Aribert," said Prince Eugen, a little later, "you were right. It is all over. I have only one refuge——"

"You don't mean——" Aribert stopped, dumfounded.

"Yes, I do," he said quickly. "I can manage it so that it will look like an accident."

TWENTY-FIRST CHAPTER.

The Return of Felix Babylon.

On the evening of Prince Eugen's fateful interview with Mr. Sampson Levi, Theodore Racksole was wandering somewhat aimlessly and uneasily about the entrance hall and adjacent corridors of the Grand Babylon. He had returned from Ostend only a day or two previously, and had endeavoured with all his might to forget the affair which had carried him there—to regard it, in fact, as done with. But he found himself unable to do so. In vain he remarked, under his breath, that there were some things which were best left alone; if his experience as a manipulator of markets, a contriver of gigantic schemes in New York, had taught him anything at all, it should surely have taught him that. Yet he could not feel reconciled to such a position. The mere presence of the princes in his hotel roused the fighting instincts of this man, who had never in his whole career been beaten. He had, as it were, taken up arms on their side, and if the Princes of Posen would not continue their own battle, nevertheless he, Theodore Racksole, wanted to continue it for them. To a certain extent of course, the battle had been won, for Prince Eugen had been rescued from an extremely difficult and dangerous position, and the enemy—consisting of Jules, Rocco, Miss Spencer, and perhaps others—had been put to flight. But that, he conceived, was not enough; it was very far from being enough. That the criminals—for criminals they decidedly were—should still be at large, he regarded as an absurd anomaly And there was another point; he had said nothing to the police of all that had occurred. He disdained the police, but he could scarcely fail to perceive that if the police should by accident gain a clue to the real state of the case he might be placed rather awkwardly, for the simple reason that in the eyes of the law it amounted to a misdemeanour to conceal as much as he had concealed.

He asked himself why he had adopted a policy of concealment, why he had become in any way interested in the Posen matter, and why, at this present moment, he should be so anxious to prosecute it further? To the first two questions he replied, rather lamely, that he had been influenced by Nella, and also by a natural spirit of adventure; to the third he replied that he had always been in the habit of carrying things through, and was now actuated by a mere childish, obstinate desire to carry this one through. Moreover, he was splendidly conscious of his perfect ability to carry it through. One additional impulse he had, though he did not admit it to himself, being by nature adverse to big words, and that was an abstract love of justice, the Anglo-Saxon's deep-founded instinct for helping the right side to conquer, even when grave risks must thereby be run, with no corresponding advantage.

He was turning these things over in his mind as he walked about the vast hotel on that evening of the last day in July. The Society papers had been stating for a week past that London was empty, but, in spite of the Society papers, London

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After years of suffering and humiliation, excessive stoutness and all the malaise and depression which accompany that condition may be cured with surprising ease by a careful course of "Russell," and the restored beauty of proportions is not merely temporary but permanent. The "Russell" treatment is the one true and scientific means of lastingly ridding the system of all superfluous fat, both internal and abdominal, whilst at the same time assuring a return to robust health and strength. The effects of the course show themselves within twenty-four hours of starting it. In that time there is a reduction varying from ½lb. to 2lb. (in extreme cases even more), and the subsequent daily decrease is steadily progressive until complete return to normal weight and beautiful proportions, when the treatment may cease. The chief agent employed is a pleasant, harmless, tonic liquid, purely vegetable in composition, and the recipe is published in "Corpulency and the Cure," Mr. Russell's standard work. The appetite is greatly improved, with increased digestive power; and as no drastic restrictions as to food are required, the increased amount of wholesome nourishment taken enriches the blood, solidifies the muscles, revivifies nerve power, and goes to promote brain force as well. Hence the wonderful recuperative and reductive effect combined of the famous "Russell" treatment. Those who desire to learn all about it should certainly procure a free copy of "Corpulency and the Cure" (256 pages), by the discoverer of the treatment. For this they have only to address three penny stamps (for postage under private envelope) to Mr. F. Cecil Russell, Woburn House, Store Street, Bedford Square, London, W.C., when a copy of the book will be sent them by return post.

Can Corpulency be Cured?

Yes, most emphatically; corpulency can be cured, and permanently cured, by means of the pleasant and easy treatment now known all over the world as the "Russell" treatment, which has once and for all replaced all the old-time exhausting and dangerous methods of fat reduction which have wrought so much harm to past generations of stout people. Those of our readers who are afflicted with too much "embonpoint" are most earnestly recommended to give a few hours' careful study to the lucidly-written little book, "Corpulency and the Cure," by the founder of the "Russell" treatment, Mr. F. Cecil Russell. A perusal of this useful and comprehensive work of 256 pages, now regarded as the standard authority, may be of untold advantage to many who have suffered for years from an uncomely and depressing burden of fat, which has withstood every kind of treatment. Many hundreds of extracts from personal statements of those who have gone through the "Russell" *régime* are printed in the book, and afford overwhelming evidence of the unique efficacy and the permanent benefits to be derived from the treatment, which is tonic, strengthening and vitalising, as well as wonderfully powerful as a permanent fat-reducing remedy. Within twenty-four hours of beginning the course, from ½lb. to 2lb. of superfluous fat is eliminated from the system, and this surprising reduction is followed by a consistent daily loss of weight until perfect proportions and normal weight are attained, when the treatment may cease. Meanwhile the appetite is greatly increased, and requires to be satisfied, the digestion is improved, and health and strength and energy become permanent possessions. There are no irrational restrictions as to food and drink. "Corpulency and the Cure," which also gives the recipe of the principal preparation—a harmless liquid of a purely herbal nature—used in the treatment, may be obtained by any of our stout friends by sending three penny stamps (for postage under sealed envelope) to Mr. F. Cecil Russell, Woburn House, Store Street, Bedford Square, London, W.C.

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persisted in seeming to be just as full as ever. The Grand Babylon was certainly not as crowded as it had been a month earlier, but it was doing a very passable business. At the close of the season the gay butterflies of the social community have a habit of hovering for a day or two in the big hotels before they flutter away to castle and country-house, meadow and moor, lake and stream. The great basket-chairs in the portico were well filled by old and middle-aged gentlemen engaged in enjoying the varied delights of liqueurs, cigars, and the full moon which floated so serenely above the Thames.

Here and there a pretty woman on the arm of a cavalier in immaculate attire swept her train as she turned to and fro in the promenade of the terrace. Waiters and uniformed commissionaires and gold-braided doorkeepers moved noiselessly about; at short intervals the chief of the doorkeepers blew his shrill whistle and hansoms drove up with tinkling bell to take away a pair of butterflies to some place of amusement or boredom; occasionally a private carriage drawn by expensive and self-conscious horses put the hansoms to shame by its mere outward glory. It was a hot night, a night for the summer woods, and save for the vehicles there was no rapid movement of any kind. It seemed as though the world—the world, that is to say, of the Grand Babylon—was fully engaged in the solemn processes of digestion and small-talk. Even the long row of the Embankment gas-lamps, stretching right and left, scarcely trembled in the still, warm, caressing air. The stars overhead looked down with many blinkings upon the enormous pile of the Grand Babylon, and the moon regarded it with bland and changeless face; what they thought of it and its inhabitants cannot, unfortunately, be recorded. What Theodore Racksole thought of the moon can be recorded—he thought it was a nuisance. It somehow fascinated his gaze with its silly stare, and so interfered with his complex meditations. He glanced round at the well-dressed and satisfied people—his guests, his customers. They appeared to ignore him absolutely. Probably only a very small percentage of them had the least idea that this tall, spare man, with the iron-grey hair and the thin, firm, resolute face, who wore his American-cut evening clothes with such careless ease, was the sole proprietor of the Grand Babylon, and possibly the richest man in Europe. As had already been stated, Racksole was not a celebrity in England. The guests of the Grand Babylon saw merely a restless male person, whose restlessness was rather a disturber of their quietude, but with whom, to judge by his countenance, it would be inadvisable to remonstrate. Therefore Theodore Racksole continued his perambulations unchallenged, and kept saying to himself, "I must do something." But what? He could think of no course to pursue.

At last he walked straight through the hotel and out at the other entrance, and so up the little unassuming side street into the roaring torrent of the narrow and crowded Strand. He jumped on a Putney 'bus, and paid his fair to Putney, fivepence, and then, finding that the humble occupants of the vehicle stared at the spectacle of a man in evening dress but without a dust-coat, he jumped off again, oblivious of the fact that the conductor jerked a thumb towards him and winked at the passengers, as who should say, "There goes a lunatic." He went into a tobacconist's shop and asked for a cigar. The shopman mildly inquired what price.

"What are the best you've got?" asked Theodore Racksole.

"Five shillings each, sir," said the man promptly.

"Give me a penny one," was Theodore Racksole's laconic request, and he walked out of the shop smoking the penny cigar. It was a new sensation for him.

He was inhaling the aromatic odours of Eugène Rimmel's establishment for the sale of scents when a gentleman, walking slowly in the opposite direction, accosted him with a quiet, "Good-evening, Mr. Racksole." The millionaire did not at first recognise his interlocutor, who wore a travelling overcoat, and was carrying a hand bag. Then a slight, pleased smile passed over his features, and he held out his hand.

"Well, Mr. Babylon," he greeted the other, "of all persons in the wide world you are the man I would most have wished to meet."

"You flatter me," said the little Anglicised Swiss.

"No, I don't," answered Racksole; "it isn't my custom, any more than it's yours. I wanted to have a real good long yarn with you, and lo! here you are! Where have you sprung from?"

"From Lausanne," said Félix Babylon. "I had finished my duties there, I had nothing else to do, and I felt homesick. I felt the nostalgia of London, and so I came over, just as you see," and he raised the handbag for Racksole's notice. "One toothbrush, one razor, two slippers, eh!" He laughed. "I was wondering as I walked along where I should stay—me, Félix Babylon, homeless in London."

"I should advise you to stay at the Grand Babylon," Racksole laughed back. "It is a good hotel, and I know the proprietor personally."

"Rather expensive, is it not?" said Babylon.

"To you, sir," answered Racksole, "the inclusive terms will be exactly half a crown a week. Do you accept?"

"I accept," said Babylon, and added, "You are very good, Mr. Racksole."

They strolled together back to the hotel, saying nothing in particular, but feeling very content with each other's company.

"Many customers?" asked Félix Babylon.

"Very tolerable," said Racksole, assuming as much of the air of the professional hotel proprietor as he could. "I think I may say, in the storekeeper's phrase, that if there is any business about I am doing it. To-night the people are all on the terrace in the portico—it's so confoundedly hot—and the consumption of ice is simply enormous—nearly as large as it would be in New York."

"In that case," said Babylon politely, "let me offer you another cigar."

"But I have not finished this one."

"That is just why I wish to offer you another one. A cigar such as yours, my good friend, ought never to be smoked within the precincts of the Grand Babylon, not even by the proprietor of the Grand Babylon, and especially when all the guests are assembled in the portico. The fumes of it would ruin any hotel."

Theodore Racksole laughingly lighted the Rothschild Havana which Babylon gave him, and they entered the hotel arm in arm. But no sooner had they mounted the steps than little Félix became the object of numberless greetings. It appeared that he had been highly popular among his quondam guests. At last they reached the managerial room, where Babylon was regaled on a chicken, and Racksole assisted him in the consumption of a bottle of Heidsieck Monopole, Carte d'Or.

"This chicken is almost perfectly grilled," said Babylon at length. "It is a credit to the house. But, why, my dear Racksole, why in the name of Heaven did you quarrel with Rocco?"

"Then you have heard?"

"Heard! My dear friend, it was in every newspaper on the Continent. Some journals prophesied that the Grand Babylon would have to close its doors within half a year now that Rocco has deserted it. But of course I knew better. I knew that you must have had a good reason for allowing Rocco to depart, and that you must have made arrangements in advance for a substitute."

"As a matter of fact, I had not made arrangements in advance," said Theodore Racksole, a little ruefully; "but happily we have found in our second sous-chef an artist inferior only to Rocco himself. That, however, was mere good fortune."

"Surely," said Babylon, "it was indiscreet to trust to mere good fortune in such a serious matter?"

(Another long instalment next week.)

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[*In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of* SHORT STORIES.]

Two Brothers—Same Girl.

"I AM seventeen," writes "TRUE LOVE." "I am in love with a girl. My brother is also paying his attentions to her, but is rather a flirt. The young lady has a liking for both of us. I am not sure which of us she really likes the better. I also doubt whether there is any real love between her and my brother. How am I to find out the facts?"

* * * * *

It seems that the case of the young lady is "How happy could I be with either." Evidently she has not made up her own mind about the matter. The thing for you to do is to ask your brother definitely what are his own intentions. Is he really in love with her? If, as you say, he is not, then can you not ask him to desist from going further? It is fairly certain that so long as both of you continue to pay the girl attentions, so long will she keep her own counsel as to which she prefers. One or other of you must make a declaration.

The Workman's Wife Question.

THE best kind of wife, "M. R. E.," in my opinion, for a working-man, is not, as you seem to think, either a servant or a working-girl. A servant, though used to housework, has had no practice in economy, but rather the reverse, for living in the household of those wealthier than herself, she has gained ideas of life which are very often beyond her own station. A working-girl, too, has had no experience of actual housework, as from an early date she has worked out. Besides, she is not very often strong in health, owing to the nature of her life. The best kind of girl is one used to working at home for her own family, and if you could meet such a girl, who has been brought up in the country, you will have hit on the ideal wife for a working-man.

Red Hair and True Love.

"AFFLICTED."—What a funny love affair. You are nineteen, and engaged to a young lady. But you will not be able to marry until you are thirty. Your hair is of a distinct red, and much to the distress of your sweetheart, it seems to get redder and redder as time goes on. She does not say anything about it, but you can see it pains her. Do I think you ought to bind her to wait eleven years?"

* * * * *

Well, if your hair goes on reddening at such a rate, it is terrible to think what it may be like in eleven years' time. It seems a pretty severe test to ask a girl to wait so long for any man, but for you to ask her to wait until a time when your hair must become a public danger, seems like cruelty. There is, however, an old-fashioned way out of the dilemma. Tell her you will dye for her—and keep your promise.

The Friendship of Actresses.

"I WAS very friendly," writes "FREDDIE," "with a lady two years my junior. In a foolish moment we had a row, and have not spoken for some time. She has plainly told her girl friends that she wishes we had never quarrelled. In the meantime, however, I have met several ladies on the stage who have much attracted me. I have not the courage to break off with them and go back to the lady I quarrelled with. Meanwhile, she has not flirted or taken walks with anybody else. What would you advise?"

* * * * *

As there are several "ladies on the stage," I suppose one may say there is safety in numbers. You have not fallen in love with any special lady, but are merely attracted by all of them, so why should you not resume your former friendship with the other young lady? Take pity on her, and see how constant she has been to you, even though you have quarrelled, and try to make it up. The fascination of "ladies on the stage" is not a serious affair, and happens to most young men once in their lives. It is a very different thing from real love, however, and you should not confuse the two.

On Leaving a Dance.

"BERTIE."—If you find you have to leave the dance when you are still down on three ladies' programmes, it would be the correct thing for you to try to find the ladies, and make your apologies in person. If, as you say, you cannot recognise the ladies, then it might be permissible for you to request your host or hostess to apologise for you to them. It is, of course, very impolite for a partner not to turn up when his dance is due, even if he is very pleasantly occupied with another than his partner. However, ladies sometimes forgive the missing one—when they, too, are pleasantly occupied with another.

An Unhappy Engagement.

"I HAVE recently met a young man," writes "NAN," "who is engaged to another girl. It is a very unhappy engagement, as she is very unkind to him—only sees him when she likes, and sometimes says she can't come at the last moment, without any explanation. I am violently in love with him, and he comes to see me once a week. He has never said he is in love with me, but tells me all about his miserable affair with the other girl. He thinks she is tired of him, but does not care to say so. How can I act?"

* * * * *

As he seems to confide everything in you, it really seems as though he is fond of you. Men don't usually confide their love affairs to other girls otherwise. While, of course, you must not interfere in his own engagement, however unhappy it may be, by continuing to show your sympathy his feelings towards you may grow to such an extent that he will break off the engagement for you. Don't attempt to force matters, but rest content with the present state of affairs, until things develop.

The Troubles of Entertaining.

"WHY do I feel so awkward and ill at ease," writes "RECENTLY MARRIED," "whenever my husband brings any friends home to tea or supper? I am very nervous, and cannot think of anything to say to my guests. My husband, I am sure, is much annoyed about it."

* * * * *

I am sure "RECENTLY MARRIED," that if you think less about your feelings, and remember that you, as hostess, should be the one to try and put your visitors at their ease, you will soon get over your nervousness, and will forget that you ever were so shy.

Cynthia

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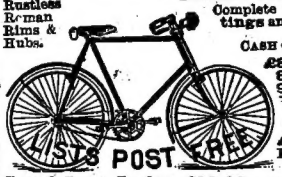

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